PREACHING - AN AWESOME TASK

WRATH, FINAL JUDGEMENT, HELL AND THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

ERYL DAVIES

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an awesome task

Wrath, Final Judgement, Hell and the Glorious Gospel

Eryl Davies

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Commendations

This book serves as a reality check for the gospel preacher. By way of clear exegesis, stirring quotations, telling illustrations and probing questions, Eryl Davies compels us to ask, 'Does my preaching about the wrath of God reflect the manner and method of my Saviour's?' I remember being deeply stirred by this book when I first started out in the ministry in the 1980s, and it has had the same effect on me now, some 30 years later. Over the years it is fairly easy for a preacher to settle into preaching Biblical Truth in a way that he and his hearers are comfortable and at ease with. This book jolts us out of any preaching-comfort-zone by warning, urging and encouraging us to preach wrath, final judgement, hell and the glorious gospel in a way that our Master Preacher and Precious Saviour did.

Paul Pease, Pastor, Hook Evangelical Church, Surrey.

Of the many reasons the Church has for giving thanks to the Lord for Eryl Davies, his writings over the years on this subject rank near the forefront. This book provides a thorough yet readable reminder of Christian doctrine sadly often neglected, both in personal meditation and public preaching, by the modern church. May its publication prove a great stimulus to the preaching of these awesome realities!

Gordon Cook, Pastor, New Inn Congregational Church, South Wales

What ministers do on their holidays is probably worthy of a book in and of itself. The individuality of a minister comes out particularly in this area. My habit is to basically recharge my batteries by reading books I've not had the time to read during the previous year. In the summer of 2015 I had managed to complete all my holiday reading with two days still remaining and so, with smug satisfaction, I looked on my father in law's shelf in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, and it was there I found the 1983 edition of 'The Wrath of God' by Dr Eryl Davies. The reason I decided to read it was that it was the substance of 3 addresses from the 1981 Bala Ministers Conference. There is something about addresses which are only given to ministers that makes them nearly always worth reading. Added to that, this was the first Bala conference after the death of Dr Lloyd Jones, with whom he had been so closely associated.

Another particular value in this volume is that I don't think in my 13 years as a minister I have known of 3 main addresses at a minister's conference being devoted to the wrath of God. The style is directed to ministers and yet is accessible to all believers. The fact that we are still, as evangelicals, so reluctant to speak of the wrath of God and the doctrine of hell, means that these addresses, given over 35 years ago are as relevant now as they were then.

In evangelism we all know that it's at the point when people realise we are saying, that, without Jesus Christ, they are under the wrath of God; they are lost, are without God and without hope, that we risk the greatest offence. There are truths contained within this short book that we'd rather not think about and yet, without proclaiming them, we are not being faithful. We have to regain our nerve in preaching the gospel. Being so desperate to gain ourselves a hearing, we are in danger of preaching sermons that bear no resemblance to what we see in the book of Acts. We must not relegate the preaching of the wrath of God to seminars and follow up courses.

Dr Davies has spent a lifetime serving Christ's church as a Pastor, a theologian and a local churchman. The need for Biblical wisdom in dealing with the wrath of God is ably met by him. I commend this volume to you and pray that it will have a wide readership. It will take you a couple of hours to read, but it will be worth it. God willing your preaching will be changed by it and so will the people God has entrusted to your care.

Paul Levy, Minister, International Presbyterian Church, Ealing, London

I'm grateful that this necessary book by Dr Eryl Davies is being reprinted, with the addition of two new chapters. Looking at the doctrine of hell has never been popular or palatable, but it has always been necessary. Dr Davies has undertaken his task with diligence and compassion. His pastoral concern, both for the church and world is clear in this honest, applied and necessary book.'

Philip Swann, Pastor, Llanelli Evangelical Church

In this important work, Dr Davies reminds us of truths that have been neglected in our evangelical churches. May this book stir our hearts, not only to preach the Gospel again, but to do it with clarity and earnestness.

Wyn Hughes, Pastor, Heath Evangelical Church, Cardiff

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Foreword

I first got to know Eryl Davies through reading his *Heaven is a Far Better Place*. I never dreamt back then that I would one day have the honour to pick up part of his mantle, leading the ministry at Bryntirion. What impressed me then—and still impresses me now, having got to know him—was not only the robustness of his biblical foundations, but also the vigour of his God-centredness.

These are qualities clearly displayed once again here in this book. Here we see that, just as God is himself the glory and delight of heaven, so he is a consuming fire to unbelievers. These are qualities I want to see cultivated in the preachers and pastors of the next generation. We need church leaders who know that there is nothing better or more beautiful than God in his glorious grace, and nothing more terrible than that same God in his righteous wrath. We also need preachers who will speak both as boldly and as sensitively about these great things as the author does here.

That last point leads me to something else. Eryl Davies has spent a lifetime championing an understanding of preaching that is today under threat. As he argues here, evangelical preachers are called to be *more* (though never less!) than orthodox and able to teach: their hearts must be *affected* by the glory of God in his grace and judgement. We do not need lecturers, entertainers or moralisers in our pulpits: we need heralds of God who share their Lord's passion and compassion.

Lord, grant your church such men, and use this book to shape them!

Michael Reeves
Bryntirion
February 2016

Preface: second edition

The contents of this book originally formed the substance of addresses delivered at the annual Ministers' Conference of the Evangelical Movement of Wales at Bryn-y-groes, Bala, North Wales in June 1981. To many ministers in Wales and England, the 'Bala' Conference[2] continues to be a precious time of instruction, prayer, fellowship and conferring. I am grateful to the 1981 Conference members for the gracious way they received these talks and their request for them to be in print.[3]

Were it not for the request in the summer of 2015 by a young pastor in England to re-print the book, it is very likely that this new edition would never have appeared. He discovered the book (long out of print) on a bookshelf in a minister's study in Northern Ireland and found it helpful. At that point he contacted me to request a reprint because he wants more pastors to read it. I appreciate his support and thank him for writing a commendation.

I have resisted the temptation to expand the theme and detailed aspects of the subject[4] unduly in order to keep this as a small book which can be easily read and consulted by preachers and Church members. That fact has been impressed upon me by pastors and publisher alike. However, I have edited the contents in a few places. I have updated the book by inserting references to more recent writings. While adding a few sentences I have also deleted others.

There are four further changes from the 1984 edition which can be noted. One change is that the chapters have been divided so there are now twelve chapters rather than the original five. This is intended to make the book more user-friendly. Another change is that study questions are included at the end of the chapters to stimulate further reflection on the subject.

A third change is a brief but new penultimate chapter which was originally part of an address I delivered to the Westminster Conference in 1991 on the Lord's handling of the doctrine of divine wrath and hell. I have included this biblical study here because it complements earlier chapters and I suspect many younger preachers are unaware of the material. Furthermore, even though preachers often struggle in preaching the doctrine of wrath, judgement and hell yet we rarely examine the way that the Lord Jesus Christ communicated the subject in his own ministry on earth. Obviously there is much for us to learn here.

The last change is that in the final chapter I outline and highlight a Gospel sermon preached in 1963. It is a sermon which has moved me deeply in recent years as I have read and re-read it in print. I am gripped by the passionate and biblical manner in which the preacher proclaimed the message of Christ. The chapter was needed in order to relate the truths of wrath, judgement and hell even more to the infinite and glorious love of God in Christ. It is surely amazing grace and 'tis mercy all'! Hopefully too this final chapter

will challenge and excite us further concerning the nature and necessity of Gospel preaching.

Readers will quickly discover that this book is not an abstract, boring study of biblical doctrine but rather an attempt to elucidate and apply biblical teaching in the urgent context of evangelism and the preaching of the gospel.

May our triune God be pleased to stir preachers in the faithful, prayerful discharge of their responsibilities in what are exciting but challenging days of opportunity. Can I plead with congregations and pastors to engage more fervently and persistently in private and corporate prayer to our gracious God for his blessing and help in the proclamation of the gospel?

Eryl Davies
Cardiff.
February 2016

Chapter One
God's wrath

Several writers have remarked that there are more references in the Bible to the anger and wrath of God than to the love of God.[5] There are also in the Old Testament alone over twenty Hebrew words used to describe the wrath of God, and these words are used nearly six hundred times. Contrary to popular opinion, the New Testament retains and develops this emphasis so that one writer claims with justification that 'the Bible could be called the book of God's wrath, for it is full of portrayals of divine retribution, from the cursing and banishment of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to the overthrow of "Babylon" and the great assizes of Revelation'.[6]

Definition

Wrath describes *the controlled and permanent opposition of God's*

holy nature to all sin. Such hatred of sin on God's part is not a whim or an arbitrary decision, nor is it uncontrolled temper or capriciousness, as some imagine. Rather it is the consistent and necessary response of God's perfect, clean nature to sin. For this reason, wrath is as basic to the divine nature as is love; and without wrath God would cease to be God.

Wrath, therefore describes God's permanent opposition to sin, an opposition which has been and is still being revealed in the world. In his exegesis of Romans 1:18, Professor Tasker rightly observed that this revelation of divine wrath is not a 'prophetic present' (that is, a wrath which 'is going to be revealed' in the final day of wrath, as in Romans 2:5); nor is it a 'strict present' (namely, a wrath which 'is at this moment being revealed' with its manifestation being restricted to Paul's day). Rather, insists Tasker, it is a 'frequentative present', that is, a wrath which 'is continually being revealed'.[7]

Expressions of God's wrath

Both the Bible and history confirm the correctness of Tasker's exegesis. For example, the disharmony within nature and the existence of pain and death are eloquent testimonies to the divine wrath, as were the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When Israel disobeyed God, whether in the wilderness or in the period of the Judges or under the prophets prior to the exile in Babylon, God's wrath was regularly stirred into activity against their sin. The destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, involving the massacre of many Jews and the dispersing of others, must be similarly understood (Luke 21:23).

On the other hand, this wrath is sometimes expressed differently as in Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 when God withdraws in varying degrees his restraints from sinners, allowing them uncontrolled indulgence in the most detestable and hideous forms of sin. While

such indulgence is temporarily attractive, yet God's justice and wrath ensure that sinners reap what they sow. Suffering, disease, violence, strife, anarchy, wars, immorality, crime and unhappiness follow necessarily in the wake of such sin as the manifestations of God's wrath (Galatians 6:8–9).

Governments, magistrates, God-honouring laws, godly parents, a holy church, the knowledge and preaching of the Word are some of the means God uses to restrain and control sin. Through such means God exercises a preventing and restraining influence upon sinners, with the result that they are often unable to indulge in the grosser sins which rage in their hearts. In this way sin is curbed and the standards of justice and morality maintained within a stable society. There are times, however, when the holy God withdraws these restraints and in his wrath abandons people to the pursuit of their evil desires and plans. The contemporary situation in the West can be understood in this light.

The day of wrath

The wrath of God, however, is not only manifested in the 'frequentative present' (Romans 1:18). The Bible also teaches that this divine wrath will burst in like a flood upon the ungodly in the final 'day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God'. It was this fact that John the Baptist referred to in Matthew 3:7 before he urged upon them the necessity of true conversion as the only means of escaping this wrath which is symbolized in terms of 'fire' in verses 10 and 12.

Some of the Lord's parables stress this point like the imagery of the final 'harvest' at the end of the world (Matthew 13: 24–30). Similarly the apostle Paul, speaking of his own people, writes: '… you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God' (Romans 2:5). Unbelievers are 'children of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3) and if they do

not believe on the Lord Jesus before dying, they will experience God's wrath when they die. In addition, the divine wrath will fall upon all unbelievers in a way which will be unrestrained in 'the day of wrath'.

In Romans 5:9 Paul again refers to this eschatological wrath which will be unleashed upon the unbelieving world at the day of judgement, but here he speaks of it as a wrath from which believers will be saved through Christ. This is underlined also in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 where we read that the Lord Jesus has delivered us from the 'wrath to come'. John Flavel wrote:

> He died not to procure a mitigation or abatement of the rigour or severity of the sentence, but to rescue his people fully from all degrees of wrath ... All the wrath of God to the last drop, was squeezed out into that bitter cup which Christ drank off, and wrung out the very dregs thereof.[8]

It is in the Apocalypse—the last book in the Bible—that the most vivid descriptions are given of this impending wrath. In the sixth chapter, when the sixtieth seal is opened, symbolizing the introduction of the final judgement day, a description is given of the accompanying signs, such as the earthquake, the darkness of the sun, the moon's blood-like appearance, the rolling up of the heavens like a piece of paper, and the moving out of position of the mountains and islands. It is not, however, these great cataclysmic changes, nor death, that seize the ungodly with terror, but rather the presence of God and the 'wrath of the Lamb' (see also Zephaniah 1:14, Joel 2:11 and Malachi 3:2 for some Old Testament background). But in Revelation chapter six there is the universal cry of unbelievers: 'the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' (verse 17). Rather than face this wrath of God, they vainly ask for the mountains and rocks to fall on them in order to hide them 'from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'

Later in Revelation chapter 14 our attention is drawn to the victory of the church. Here a description of the bliss of the Lord's people is followed by a series of warnings to mankind of the events preceding the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus, and the warning issued loudly by the third angel is that the divine wrath will fall upon all those who 'worship the beast' (verses 9–10). Yes, here and now the wrath of God is mixed with his grace and kindness but in the last day this wrath will be unmixed and unrelieved for unbelievers.

Finally, in chapter 19, after the account of the marriage of the Lamb, we are provided with a description of our victorious, conquering Saviour, here called 'Faithful and True'. He is pictured at his second appearing seated on a white horse to 'strike the nations' and 'He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron'. In other words, Christ 'Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God' (verse 15) by executing the divine sentence upon the ungodly.

It is within this context, therefore, and against this biblical background that we must view our lives and our ministries. The wrath of God is an awesome reality that we must preach clearly but compassionately, for the divine wrath will fall upon unbelievers worldwide one day. However, even before that awful day this wrath means that unbelievers when they die physically are hell-bound.

In the next chapter we will begin to consider the majestic holiness of God.

Review

1. Identify some Hebrew words in the Old Testament used to describe God's wrath.
2. How can you help others to obtain a clearer, biblical grasp of the wrath of God?

3. Note any observations you want to make on the *expressions* of God's wrath.

Chapter Two
The majesty and holiness of God (1)

A basic question arises here and one which many people raise when they hear about wrath and hell. Is it fair for God to react to sin and unbelievers in this way? Is it not a response unworthy of a loving God? In a society where tolerance, permissiveness and the principle of human autonomy regulate the thinking and behaviour of the majority of people in our secular, postmodern culture, the wrath of God is regarded as an anathema and a primitive concept which is now unintelligible and unreasonable. Here is an objection which challenges and impacts not only the gospel but also the character of God himself. And the objection must be considered before we proceed further.

Objection

Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, commenting on Romans 3:25, argues that one reason why people object to the doctrine of God's wrath is because 'they substitute Greek philosophy for the biblical revelation.'[9] There are additional reasons but Dr Lloyd-Jones is correct. To ancient Greek philosophers the concept of wrath was obnoxious for they viewed it as a defect of character which needed to be eliminated from our thinking, and from all descriptions of God. For them, God was an impassive Being incapable of reacting to human behaviour. Under this and other dominant influences, scholars and theologians throughout the past couple of centuries have tended to reject the biblical concept of divine wrath as something 'unworthy' of God and 'primitive' in origin.

Professor D.A. Carson also tackles this objection helpfully.[10] He underlines the fact that wrath is an aspect and expression of God's holy nature against sin. This point is crucial. If there were no sin then there would be no wrath on God's part, but there is always love in God. Further, in confirming Lloyd-Jones's reference to the influence of Greek philosophy on theology, the impassibility of God has 'depersonalized and de-emotionalized' God's wrath in reducing it as in C.H. Dodd's famous teaching in the mid-twentieth century to the impersonal effects of our sin in our lives and culture. Nor should we suggest that God in himself (that is, the immanent Trinity) is free of any possibility of wrath while God in his dealings with ourselves as sinners (that is, the economic Trinity) does express wrath. This distinction has no biblical basis. Wrath is a necessary and reasonable response of God's holy nature against sin while his love 'wells up amidst his perfections *and is not generated by the loveliness of the loved*'.[11] The Holy Spirit brings believers under the supreme authority of the Scriptures rather than Greek and secular philosophy so that ministers of the Word are called and

equipped by the living God to preach his infallible self-revelation, which includes the message of wrath.

Examine ourselves

Here we need to examine ourselves, our beliefs and our preaching critically. Are we declaring the whole counsel of God? Does the glory of God's perfections permeate our own thinking and preaching, or are we in danger of reducing God in the eyes of our congregations to a benign and helpless grandfather figure? Some of us may be assailed by lingering doubts concerning the divine wrath and hell, or we may be reluctant and afraid to preach this doctrine for various reasons. One major failure on the part of many preachers is an inadequate appreciation of the ineffable glory of the triune God. Consequently his holiness and wrath have not been given a proper biblical emphasis and balance in our preaching.

I suggest there are at least two contributory factors here. One is a wrong pietistic emphasis which seeks mostly a devotional 'uplift' or 'blessing' but which shrinks from grappling with the full revelation of the glory of God. Do not misunderstand me, an experiential concern must also be God-centred and my fear is that we may not be digging deep enough into the Word to gaze with awe and wonder on the glories of God.

There is another factor too, and that is our difficulty in recognising the awfulness of sin. If our view of sin is superficial and tolerant then we are more liable to regard God's holy opposition to sin as being extreme, with the result that we tone down, subconsciously at least, the biblical emphasis.

To underline this important point, I want now to relate the perfection of God's moral nature to sin in the context of Isaiah chapter six. Unless we see this important relationship, our

understanding of God's wrath will be defective. There are two main points I want to establish in this context from Isaiah chapter six.

The majesty of God.

Our forefathers were correct in viewing sin primarily as an offence and insult against the infinite dignity and majesty of God. Let us see therefore how this majesty of God is described in Isaiah 6. God is, for example, 'the Lord' (Hebrew: *adonai*) meaning basically the One who is able to carry out all his purposes. Not even one of his plans has failed in the past and he will certainly not fail in the future to achieve his purposes. There is no weakness or failure belonging to God. Rather he is the Almighty One who declares, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure' (Isaiah 46:10).

He is also described here as 'sitting on a throne', reminding us of his absolute and personal control over the heavens and earth. But he is also 'high and lifted up'. This means that he is apart from us and wholly other than ourselves. He is not part of creation or nature but rather transcendent, separate from ourselves and exalted above all. Such is the infinite majesty of God that he is surrounded by seraphs who cry out incessantly before him the chorus of worship: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory' (verse 3). If you view sin in this context then you will not marvel that God is angry with sinners and that he punishes unbelieving rebels in hell.

Insult

Sin is an offence and insult against this glorious Person. 'When they knew God', writes Paul, 'they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but ... changed the glory of the incorruptible God ...' (Romans 1:21,23). Sin involves a despising of the divine majesty, representing a despicable rejection of his

authority and law as the Creator God; sin is an offence against an infinite Being. As dreadful as hell is, affirms Jonathan Edwards, it is 'not more so than the Being is great and glorious against whom you have sinned … The wrath of God that you have heard of … is not more dreadful than that Majesty which you have despised and trampled on is awful'[12]

It is in relation to God, therefore, that sin assumes its essential significance; it is not a mere defect, mistake or weakness in humans or even merely an unsociable action but rather an offence against the holy, transcendent God. 'Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight', confessed David (Psalm 51:4). 'How can I do this great wickedness', exclaimed Joseph to Potiphar's wife when she tried to tempt him to sleep with her, 'and sin against God?' Sin is active rebellion against God, opposition to his authority, contempt of his person, the breaking of his law and the despising of his Word and love.

We see this illustrated in the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis three, when they refused to submit to and obey the revealed will of God. Samuel Bolton, a Puritan pastor, emphasised that

> Sin is the Practical-blasphemy of all the name of God. It is the Dare of his Justice, the Rape of his Mercy, the Jeer of his Patience, the Slight of his Power, the Contempt of his Love.

'Sin', said Ralph Venning, is 'an affront to God's authority' while John Manton described sin as 'an affront to God's authority… contempt of God himself' and 'unsubjection to God'. John Owen added that when sin is committed then 'the whole authority of God, and therein God himself, is despised'.[13] God has created all things and all people for his pleasure and glory yet people continue to defy their Creator and even imagine that God is not on his throne.

We must warn sinners of the One against whom they sin—that

they are sinning against the all-perfect, wise, almighty, holy, infinite, loving God, who has given us all things richly to enjoy. Here is the evil of sin: it is committed against this great God,[14] who will nevertheless ensure that His holy name will be glorified in creation, whether in the salvation of the elect or the damnation of the ungodly.

We continue this theme in the next chapter as we focus further on the holiness of God.

Review

1. *'It is both unfair and unloving for God to express his wrath'.* Consider ways of answering this objection biblically and clearly.
2. Is sin really so serious?
3. Reflect in depth on the greatness and majesty of the triune God.

Chapter Three
The majesty and holiness of God (2)

Now we consider sin in relation to the *holiness* of God. As the seraphs gazed upon the holy nature of God they chanted the anthem recorded in Isaiah 6:3. I want to draw attention here to two aspects of God's holiness.

The holiness of God

a. First of all, the holiness of God means that he is free from all sin. It is difficult for us to appreciate this truth, for we are ourselves so accustomed to sin. Sin is active within our lives as believers and preachers, and it is acted before our eyes in the world and, regrettably, in the church too. We live in a world dominated and

permeated by sin, so it is far from easy for us to conceive of God as being free of all sin. Yet this is the testimony of the Bible: 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). There is no trace of evil or imperfection in God; His nature shines with a purity that compels the seraphs to veil their faces in reverence.

b. Secondly, the holiness of God means that he hates sin with an intense hatred. Any deviation from his pure and spotless nature, and from the law which mirrors that holiness, is abhorrent to him. Let me illustrate this point, for it is foundational to our appreciation of the divine wrath.

As a consequence of regeneration and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, believers have themselves a hatred of sin which is universal. I recall dealing with a particularly sordid pastoral problem on one occasion, and being compelled to leave the room with a feeling of deep abhorrence. One felt angry and sickened at what one heard. Or consider the reaction of the apostle Paul when he saw the city of Athens wholly given over to idolatry. Luke records that 'his spirit was provoked in him' (Acts 17:16); that is, Paul was angry, and there was a fire of indignation and detestation burning within him.

We must, however, multiply this kind of reaction millions and millions of times before we begin to approximate to God's intense and perfect hatred of sin. 'For You art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,' writes the psalmist, 'Nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight: You hate all workers of iniquity ... the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man' (Psalm 5:4–6). The holiness that even the angels possess is by comparison like the feeble light of a matchstick on a dark country road compared with the blaze and light of the sun at midday. Such is the contrast, and if we are to preach God's wrath with conviction and urgency, there is need for us as preachers to be gripped and moved by this aspect of the divine glory.

It is because God hates sin that his wrath is stirred against the sinner, but 'it is our insensitivity to sin', writes Jonathan Edwards, 'that prevents our realizing how hell-deserving sin is; our devilish dispositions make sin not appear "horrid"'.[15] Is this not true? Audacious, proud sinners ridicule the concept of divine wrath; even some 'evangelicals' titter in incredulity at the mention of hell; but these people do not reckon with the holiness of God. 'Hell', remarked one preacher, 'is scorched through and through by the holiness of God.' Therefore 'to sin', wrote Isaac Watts, 'is not a light and trifling matter'.

How hateful is sin to us? Are the truths of the wrath and holiness of God only theories which leave us soundly unmoved? One thing is certain. If we fail to reckon with the infinite holiness of God, the wrath of God will always remain for us a difficult doctrine. God hates all sin, including the sins committed by Christians. His holy nature cannot compromise with sin or tolerate it anywhere; not even on the cross did the holy God change his attitude towards sin, but he punished it in the Person of our Redeemer, thus magnifying his justice and holiness. One of the reasons why Martin Luther distinguished between the merciful wrath of God and the wrath of his severity was because of God's universal hatred of sin. The merciful wrath of God is shown to the saints, leading them to repentance and faith. While God chastises and humbles believers for their sin, his wrath towards them remains a merciful wrath; but the wrath of his severity is reserved for the ungodly, and leads to hell.

Evangelism

We need to relate this doctrine of divine wrath to evangelism, and more especially to our work as preachers of the gospel.

In 2 Peter 3 the apostle gives us a twofold reason why the day of the Lord has not yet come. The first reason concerns the character

of God, namely, his eternity and faithfulness (vv.8–9). The second reason which is emphasized has to do with the purpose of God, and in this context there are two aspects which can be underlined and applied.

a. Peter declares that God is 'longsuffering' (verse 9) towards us

While God's wrath is a fact, yet he is extremely patient and forbearing with sinners. The way in which John Elias disciplined his children in the early nineteenth-century in Wales is an instructive example of long-suffering. Elias firmly believed in correcting his children, but on the first offence he would only rebuke the child. If the offence was repeated, Elias would issue a further rebuke, but this time, in addition, he would extract a promise that the child would not misbehave again. When the bad behaviour was repeated a third time, John Elias punished the child, but first of all he prayed with his wife, beseeching God's mercy for their child.[16] Elias was certainly not guilty of impetuous or bad-tempered behaviour towards his children; his response to their sin was a controlled and patient one.

Now Peter is saying something similar in this verse. The wrath of God is the controlled reaction of God's holy nature to sin, but it is a wrath he holds back for as long as possible. He will justly punish sinners, but stays his hand of wrath for as long as possible, as he did in the days of Noah and prior to the Exile. The reason, then, why this awful day of wrath has not yet arrived is owing to God's kindness and longsuffering towards us.

When faced with suffering and the desperate needs of other people, even Christians can be indifferent and heartless in their response. We know, for example, that unbelievers are in the greatest danger, yet our attempts to reach them with the gospel are pathetic and half-hearted. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem, but it is a rare occurrence today for believers to weep in prayer for the

vast multitudes of people speeding towards hell. Are we projecting our own heartlessness and indifference on to God? If so, we are misrepresenting him, for he burns in love and passionate concern for sinners. Peter continues by saying he is 'not willing that any should perish'. God is not a heartless being. 'As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked …' (Ezekiel 33:11). Hell is a dreadful punishment, but God does not gloat over the punishment of sinners in hell.

b. The final statement to be noted is 'that all should come to repentance'

Although God's purpose is the saving of his elect, his goodness and love invite and command all to repent. Yet, according to verse 10, the doors will be closed one day, the end will come, and the day of grace will pass away. As preachers of the gospel we find ourselves today facing huge challenges but we also face these challenges in a day of grace and exciting opportunities. The great day of the Lord's wrath has not yet come. So, while there is still time, we must declare to sinners everywhere the glorious gospel of Christ.

In the next chapter we will outline the Bible's teaching about judgement.

Review

1. Do you need to review the way in which you understand and teach God's holiness? If so, in which respects and how will you do this?
2. Reflect further on the relevance of 2 Peter 3 for evangelistic preaching AND the encouraging of holiness amongst believers.
3. In which other ways are you being challenged concerning your own discipleship and ministry?

Chapter Four
Final Judgement

In much the same way as the divine wrath culminates in the great day of wrath, so the judgement of God upon sinners reaches its climax in the final judgement. 'The Lord is a God of justice,' says Isaiah (30:18), and he is so continually, both in the affairs of this life and more personally at death, when our destinies are sealed in private and personal judgement (Hebrews 9:27). Nevertheless, the Scriptures also look forward to a final judgement, which is associated in the Old Testament with 'the day of the Lord' (Amos 5:18ff; Zephaniah 1:14ff; Malachi 4:1, etc.), and in the New Testament with the personal return of the Lord Jesus in glory (for example, Matthew 25:31–46).

One Judgement

Dispensationalists[17] and pre-millennialists[18] suggest there are at least three different final judgements. First of all, a judgement of risen and living believers, which takes place immediately at the second coming of Christ. The purpose of this judgement will be to distribute rewards and vindicate the Lord's people. Then some seven years later, at the day or revelation of Christ immediately following the great tribulation, there will be another judgement in which Gentile nations will be judged as nations. Thirdly, a thousand years later, there will be the judgement of the unbelieving dead before the great white throne.

However, the Scriptures do not speak of several judgements, but of one judgement at the end of the world. For example, the Lord warns, 'Many will say to me in that day …' (Matthew 7:22); further, the apostle Paul declares, 'He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained …' (Acts 17:31). Peter, too, speaks of the heavens and the earth being 'reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men' (2 Peter 3:7). I do not intend to pursue this in detail but instead I am underlining basic principles relating to the final judgement which are relevant to the theme of God's wrath and to the preaching of the gospel.

I will now emphasize a few aspects of the final judgement:

a. Its inseparable relationship to the wrath of God

Rather than being a change of subject, final judgement is necessarily related to the character and glory of God. We can observe this in several ways.

In the first place, the law by which God will judge people is not an arbitrary standard, but the expression of his holy nature and will.

It is the One who is *holy*, declares Peter, who 'judges according to each one's work' (1 Peter 1:17).

Again, God's *justice* is inseparably related to this final day of judgement. God's justice is the attribute by which He deals in vengeance with all the violations of His law, and in the final judgement He will dispense rewards and punishments both to humans and angels. All the injustices, wickedness, hypocrisy and irregularities that mar the life of this world will be punished then. This retributive justice will be a signal expression of the wrath of God. In this world it often seems as if corruption and might prevail rather than justice, and sometimes there seems to be no God in heaven. But although God allows injustices to continue here, he records human deeds in his book, and he has appointed Christ to judge the world and execute a righteous judgement.

Furthermore, as God's supreme purpose in the world is his own glory, the final judgement will provide a glorious display of his *majesty and authority.* This will be a public judgement, as distinct from a private one at death; it will involve the judgement of body and soul and will be confirmatory in nature. This public, universal judgement will be the platform on which God will display to the whole world his glorious Person, including his fierce wrath, his strict justice and yet his amazing love. We must view the final judgement, then, as a necessary, glorious expression and vindication of the justice and wrath of God.

b. Christ Himself is the Judge

In His mediatorial role Christ will be the Judge. As he himself tells us, God the Father has 'given Him authority to execute judgement also, because He is the Son of Man' (John 5:27). The privilege, then, of judging people and angels has been granted to Christ as part of his reward and exaltation for his obedience 'to the point of death, even the death of the cross' (Philippians 2:8).

'Judgement', explains John Flavel, 'is the act of the whole undivided Trinity. The Father and Spirit judge, as well as Christ, in respect of authority and consent, but it is the act of Christ, in respect of visible management and execution.' Thus, since the Father and the Holy Spirit judge by him, the Lord can say without contradiction, 'the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgement to the Son' (John 5:22).

The act of judging relates, of course, to the kingly office of the Lord Jesus. Because of his humiliation he did not regularly exercise this kingly office when he was upon earth, though we see examples of his kingship on occasions as in his triumphant entry into Jerusalem prior to his death, and also in the title Pilate wrote over his cross—'This is the King of the Jews' (Luke 23: 38). In the final judgement, however, this kingly office of the Saviour will be apparent for all to see.

Jonathan Edwards, in his usually thorough way, suggests reasons for the appropriateness of Christ being appointed judge of the world rather than the Father:

> God sees fit, that he who is in the human nature, should be the judge of those who are of the human nature. Christ has this honour ... given him, as a suitable reward for his sufferings.
>
> It is needful that Christ should be the judge of the world, in order that he may finish the work of redemption ... Now, the redemption of fallen man ... is actually fulfilled, in converting sinners ... in carrying them on in the way of grace ... and in finally raising their bodies to life, in glorifying them, in pronouncing the blessed sentence upon them, in crowning them with honour and glory in the sight of men and angels, and in completing and perfecting their reward.
>
> It was proper that he who is appointed king of the church should rule till he should have put all his enemies under his feet; in order

> to which, he must be the judge of his enemies, as well as of his people … and then he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father: 1 Corinthians 15:24–25 … it is proper that he who at present reigns, and is carrying on the war against those who are of the opposite kingdom, should have the honour of obtaining the victory, and finishing the war.
>
> It is for the abundant comfort of the saints that Christ is appointed to be their judge … the same person who spilled his blood for them hath the determination of their state left with him … What matter of joy to them will it be at the last day, to lift up their eyes, and behold the person in whom they have trusted for salvation … and whose voice they have often heard inviting them to himself for protection and safety, coming to judge them.[19]

We must proclaim, as did the apostle, that the One who died for sinners is the King who will return gloriously to earth one day and judge all people (Acts 17:30–31). God does not merely invite or beseech sinners, but he also commands them to repent. On the authority of God's Word we must command sinners in this authoritative way.

The majesty of the Judge

'If Felix trembled when Paul preached of judgement (Acts 24:25),' exclaims Thomas Watson, 'how will sinners tremble when they shall see Christ come to judgement!'[20] Certainly the majesty of the scene will be breath-taking, especially when the Judge himself appears in his unveiled glory to judge mankind.

The brief glimpses we have in the New Testament of Christ's glory during his earthly ministry help us to appreciate something of the majesty of his appearance at the final judgement. Matthew, in his account of the transfiguration, tells us that the Lord Jesus was *'transfigured'*, that is, 'transformed' (Matthew 17:2). Luke uses

a different word, saying that 'the fashion of his countenance was *altered*', so while his face remained the same, its *appearance* was transformed (Luke 9:29). According to Matthew, 'His face shone like the sun' and 'with an innate, inherent light', suggests Matthew Henry, 'the more sensibly glorious, because it suddenly broke out, as it were, from behind a black cloud'.[21] His clothes, too, were 'as white as the light'. The explanation is that his whole body was altered just as His face was, and the light of His glory shone through His clothes. So Luke could describe them as 'white and glistening' (9:29), for he was one blaze of celestial glory.

On the last day, however, what the world will see will be Christ's Person in unveiled and magnificent glory which will be an awe-inspiring sight. Let us consider briefly three descriptions of this scene in the New Testament.

a. The first is our Lord's own description: He pictures the Son of Man accompanied by the angels and seated 'on the throne of His glory'—a throne of unimaginable splendour, matching the splendour of its occupant (Matthew 25:31).

b. Secondly, in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 the apostle Paul uses the Greek word *apokalupsis* to describe the descent of Christ from heaven: the Lord in His glory will then be fully 'disclosed' and 'uncovered' for the entire world to see. At the same time, the accompanying angels will be surrounded by fire, indicating the holiness of God manifest in judgement.

c. The final picture is John's vision of 'a great white throne, and Him who sat on it' (Revelation 20:11). The appearance of Christ on this throne is so terrifying that earth and heaven run away from him in fear. Jesus Christ will then be clearly revealed as the Judge, and everyone will be compelled to acknowledge his deity and glory.

In the next chapter we turn to consider the important matter of the basis of judgement.

Review

1. Reflect on the degree of prominence you have given to the fact of Final Judgement in your ministry.
2. In the light of John chapter 5 verses 22 and 27 consider the significance and appropriateness of Jesus Christ being the Judge.
3. Are we gripped at all by biblical teaching concerning the majesty of the Judge?

Chapter Five
The basis of judgement: believers

While angels will assist Christ in judgement (Matthew 13:41,42; 25:31), it is clear that the fallen angels will themselves be judged (Matthew 8:29; 1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), as well as every human person, whether alive or dead (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 25:32; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12). But we consider first the judgement of believers.

Judgement of believers

Believers themselves will be judged in the last day, although, of course, they will *not be liable for* condemnatory judgement, for they have been justified through Christ and eternally saved from the

wrath to come. In considering the significance of this judgement for the elect we can appeal to several verses.

The words found in 2 Corinthians 5:10 are pertinent and challenging: 'For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.'

Several words in this verse deserve comment. Bengel reminds us that the word 'appear' means that 'we must all stand revealed in our true character before the judgement seat of Christ'. There will be no possibility of pretence or deception before the omniscient Judge. We shall be laid bare before Him—'stripped of every outward façade of respectability', writes P. E. Hughes, 'and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one's character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ.'[22]

The thought of 'the judgement seat of Christ' should not depress us, but rather serve as a stimulus to greater zeal and obedience. 'Let us then imagine Christ's judgement seat to be present now,' pleads Chrysostom, 'and reckon each one of us with his own conscience, and account the judge to be already present and everything to be revealed and brought forth. For we must not merely stand but also be manifested. Do you not blush?' A similar thought is found in 1 Corinthians 3:13—'each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is'. Believers, and especially preachers, will undergo a searching test, for the day will 'declare' or 'show' in its true character the quality rather than the quantity of our work.

The purpose of this judgement for believers

According to 1 Corinthians 3:14, 'he will receive a reward' (or

'wage'). This is not a reference to salvation, but to a reward within salvation for the quality of our work. We see from 2 Corinthians 5:10 that the purpose is not wholly negative, for it includes the disclosure and reward of what is both good and bad. Dr Philip Hughes warns us against viewing this judgement as the reflecting of punishment upon believers: 'The judgement pronounced is not a declaration of doom but an assessment of worth with the assignment of rewards',[23] but all within the framework of grace and salvation. The rewards will vary from one believer to another according to the degree of faithfulness and diligence shown (Luke 19:16ff.).

One question which especially troubles believers when they hear mention of this judgement is the following: *If God has forgiven us, how can He recall our sins again?* Some contend that our sins will not be raised in the day of judgement. The implication of Scripture, however, is that our sins will be 'manifest', but only as forgiven sins. The fact that God will judge 'every idle word' (Matthew 12:36) and 'the secrets of men' (Romans 2:16), as well as 'according to what he has done' (2 Corinthians 5:10), suggests that our sins will not be excluded, for all will be 'manifest'. *How can this be consistent with forgiveness?* It is more than likely that while we shall see our sin, we shall see it only in the light of God's covenant of grace and as sin washed in the blood of Christ, so we shall then be more able to admire then praise the riches of God's grace in Christ.

Two points of application can be made here:

First of all, this fact of judgement should make us more zealous and faithful in our service of the Lord Jesus. After mentioning the fact and significance of the judgement seat of Christ, the apostle goes on immediately to say, 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men …' (2 Corinthians 5:11). These words are extremely significant. The apostle is filled with awe at the thought

of his Lord and the prospect of judgement; in the light of this he is even more constrained to 'persuade men', both believers and unbelievers. Does the judgement seat of Christ have this effect upon your life and ministry?

Secondly, it is helpful to note how the apostle applies this principle of judgement in 1 Corinthians 4:1–5, by urging ministers to be faithful stewards, irrespective of the opinions and attitudes of people towards them. The only authorised and competent judge is the Lord, so we must wait for His appearance, when judgement will be finally meted out to all, including believers. 'The Lord will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness'—whether motives, actions or thoughts—'and reveal the counsels of the hearts.' Here is infallible, perfect judgement; 'Then'—and only then—'each one's praise will come from God'.

For this reason at least, we should not be preoccupied with or distressed by the unfair and ungodly behaviour of people who oppose us. Rather, we must maintain our integrity, follow after holiness, continue in faithful service of the Lord, and keep our eyes on the Lord for he will deal with our opponents and do so finally one day in judgement.

We now turn our attention in the next chapter to the judgement of unbelievers.

Review

1. Express as clearly as possible your understanding of the judgement of believers, especially in the light of 1 Corinthians 3:13–14 and 2 Corinthians 5:10.
2. Is the judgement of believers consistent with being justified by faith?
3. Are we guilty at all of weakening or distorting the Gospel of

grace by the way we understand and teach the judgement of believers?

Chapter Six
The basis of judgement: unbelievers

With respect to the judgement of unbelievers, the basis of judgement will be the revealed will of God, both for those who are ignorant of the gospel and for those who have been privileged to hear the gospel. However, two urgent questions arise immediately at this point. Will those who have never heard the Gospel really be judged?

Some Christians believe that only those who have rejected the gospel will be judged. One obvious implication of that view is that pagans who have never heard of the way of salvation will be spared from appearing before the Judge or, if they do appear, will get off comparatively lightly. It is surprising how popular and widespread

this belief is. Christians who hold it are suggesting that there is a double standard, depending on whether or not people have heard the gospel. The implication is that in the final judgement the pagan will be better off for not having heard the gospel.

This popular belief is, however, unbiblical. People are guilty and condemned, whether they have heard the gospel or not. Paul states, 'through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and thus death spread to *all* men, because all sinned … through one man's offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation' (Romans 5:12,18). The argument, therefore, that unbelief is the only sin meriting judgement and condemnation is unbiblical. Unbelief is, of course, a great sin, so that the person who does not believe is condemned; but unbelief is not the only reason for condemnation. Before a missionary pioneers the gospel in a pagan area, and before a minister preaches to people in his vicinity, those people are already guilty and under the wrath of God.

But another important question, arises here: *Is it fair for God to judge people if they have never heard the gospel?* This question is often asked out of concern for those who never once heard about the Lord Jesus Christ. There is compassion too alongside their concern in raising the question but also a sense of injustice if such people never once heard the good news of the gospel. How can they be judged? The biblical answer includes the following important principles:

First of all, *God's judgement is always just and right.* 'We know', says Paul, 'that the judgement of God is according to truth …' (Romans 2:2); again, in the words of the apostle John, 'in righteousness He judges' (Revelation 19:11). For the psalmist, 'he shall judge the world in righteousness, and He shall administer judgement for the peoples in uprightness' (Psalm 9:8). The clear testimony of the Bible is that God is never unfair or biased in his

judgements. We must guard this principle jealously, as it concerns the glory of God's character.

In the second place, passages like Matthew 11:21–24 and Romans 2:12–16 teach us that *there are degrees of knowledge and of sin and, consequently, degrees of rewards and punishments.* 'The longer sinners live,' argues Jonathan Edwards, 'the more wrath they accumulate.' This is one reason why Edwards pleaded with children not to start living a life of sin but to be converted at an early age. 'All men', he adds, 'partake equally of original sin, but men do not partake equally of "actual sins", so that the sooner the persevering sinner dies the better!'[24] Some people, our Lord says, are more privileged than others, and more responsible. For this reason it will be more tolerable in the day of judgement for pagan cities like Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah than for Bethsaida and Capernaum. All these cities will be judged and punished yet there will be greater punishment for some than for others (Matthew 11: 20–24).

Finally, an examination of what Paul writes in Romans chapter two helps us see more clearly the basis of God's judgement for unbelievers. The basic principle is that he 'will render to each one according to his deeds' (v.6), and then proceeds to expand it in the verses that follow. Continuing in verses 11–16, the apostle teaches that *the important question is not knowledge or ignorance, but sin.* All who sin, whether in ignorance or in knowledge of the law, are regarded by God as transgressors, and they will therefore be rewarded according to their deeds.

But again the question arises: is this fair to the unenlightened, pagan Gentiles? The answer of Paul is found in verses 14 and 15. The Gentile unbelievers who are without the written Law nevertheless have the law written on their hearts, so they have an innate moral consciousness. Hendriksen suggests we should accordingly preface verse 16 with the words 'All this will become

clear'[25]—that is, thoughts, words, motives and actions will be exposed and judged in that day.

Implications

Now this is an important point in relation to our preaching today. It is not enough for us to give textual exegesis and preach the Bible soundly; in addition, we must use what Spurgeon called 'heart argument'. The truth must be addressed to the minds in the first place, but preachers dare not stop there; the consciences of the hearers must also be touched and stirred by the application of the law of God. It is a fact of the utmost significance that humans are all created in the image of God and have 'the work of the law' written upon their consciences, thus providing what Cornelius Van Til has described as 'the point of contact'.[26] 'Deep down in his mind', writes Van Til, 'every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker. But every man acts and talks as though this were not so. It is the one point that cannot bear mentioning in his presence.'[27] For this reason, if preachers do not aim for the consciences as well as the minds of their hearers, they will be defective in their work. Congregations should pray fervently for their preachers as they have the enormous task of heralding this message to rebel sinners as well as hungry and needy believers.

Responsibility and Accountability

The doctrine of final judgement also implies human responsibility and accountability. Men and women are held responsible by God for their own sin: 'the soul who sins,' God warns, 'shall die' (Ezekiel 18:4). It will not be possible to hide behind or blame other people for one's own sin. The punishment of sin will be borne by those who commit sin, unless, of course, they become Christians. Here is a truth which must be emphasized in evangelistic preaching.

Despite even the pervasiveness, corruption and dominance of sin throughout man's entire nature and the consequent inability to please or obey God, man is still held responsible by God for his sin and his response to the gospel.[28] Whatever his attitude to God and sin may be, the sinner must be informed of this basic and alarming truth.

Accountability of preachers to God

There is another sobering aspect to the subject of human responsibility, namely, the responsibility and accountability of preachers and elders to God for the quality and extent of their work. This note is sounded repeatedly throughout the Bible. The prophet Ezekiel, for example, is told, 'I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel: therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from me' (Ezekiel 3:17). God then warns His servant:

> When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die; and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. (Ezekiel 3:18,19)

On this passage Patrick Fairbairn comments:

> A salutary lesson is conveyed here to all who are put in trust with souls, as well in regard to the nature of the charge itself, as to the manner in which it ought to be fulfilled. It is emphatically the work of God they have to do, and the instrument to be wielded in the doing of it is his own word. Let this be plied with unwearied diligence, with affectionate tenderness and fervency of spirit; for the work is of infinite importance, and results past reckoning

> depend on it. Eternal weal or woe grows out of it to all who come within the field of its operations. And for oneself—whatever may be the result for others—the path of duty is the only path of safety; faithfulness to God must be the supreme rule, and his glory the chief aim. 'I have a commission to fulfil, I must deliver my own soul,'—let this be the one answer to all counter-solicitations from the flesh or the world; and it will also be the best guarantee of ultimate success.[29]

In all probability the apostle Paul had the words from Ezekiel in mind when he told the Ephesian elders at Miletus, 'Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men' (Acts 20:26). This claim was made only after three years of intensive and zealous evangelism in Ephesus, during which all the inhabitants heard the gospel through Paul, either publicly or in their homes (v.20). Such care on the apostle's part absolved him from blame and responsibility in the day of judgement.

A similar principle is found in Hebrews 13:17, where submission to church officers is enjoined. It is clear here that elders and preachers carry a heavy, solemn responsibility, for 'they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account'. Such is their responsibility that David Dickson described the ministry as 'the most dangerous of all charges, because the account of lost souls within the church shall be craved at their hands, whether they have done all that which became them to do'.[30]

The Scottish preacher, John Welch, felt this sense of responsibility greatly and spent at least eight to ten hours daily in prayer. Even in the middle of the night he would frequently rise to pray for his people. His wife naturally expressed concern at seeing him out of bed on a cold winter evening with only a plaid wrapped around him while he prayed. Welch's answer was: 'O woman, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them.' In the light of the fast approaching day of

judgement, we all need to show the same diligence and burden for unbelievers.

In the next chapter we will refer to some definitions of hell.

Review

1. Describe in your own words the biblical teaching regarding the judgement of those who die without hearing the Gospel.
2. Exegete and apply Romans 2:14–16 to the church's task of mission.
3. What are the implications of Ezekiel 3:17–19, Acts 20:26 and Hebrews 13:17 for preachers?

Chapter Seven
Hell: some definitions

Four words are translated as 'hell' in the Authorized Version of the Bible so we must begin by carefully defining these words. This is especially important because increasing numbers of writers and preachers within historic denominations and evangelical churches espouse conditional immortality/annihilation, claiming that belief in a traditional hell is due to ignorance and prejudice. In addition, groups as wide ranging as Seventh Day Adventists, Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses also insist we have misunderstood the significance of these Bible words. These are serious charges which we must address, albeit briefly.

The four words translated 'hell' in the Authorized King James Version are *She'ol, Hades, Tartarus* and *Gehenna*. We now examine each in turn.

Tartarus

This is a Greek name for the underworld, and especially for the abode of the damned. It is used only once in the New Testament, in a verbal form ('cast them down to hell' '*Tartarus*') in 2 Peter 2:4. Here Peter is describing the punishment of God upon the fallen angels; they are consigned to a place of intense darkness which functions as a prison for its inhabitants. Clearly therefore this is a reference to hell. The real controversy, however, rages around the other three words, which we must now consider in more detail.

She'ol and *Hades*

One of the most common Hebrew words to describe the location of the dead in the Old Testament is *She'ol*, which means 'the depths' or 'the unseen state'. This word occurs 65 times in the Old Testament. Another word similar to it is the Greek word *Hades*, which appears ten times in the New Testament. What then is the significance of these two words? If we study their usage in the Old and New Testaments we will find that they are employed in more than one way and this fact is crucial for correctly interpreting them in context.

Sometimes the word '*She'ol*' denotes the state of death into which believers and unbelievers alike are brought; references like 1 Samuel 2:6, Job 14:13,14 and 17:13,14, and Psalm 89:48, all have this connotation. Similarly in the New Testament the term '*Hades*' sometimes has this meaning. In Acts 2:27 and Revelation 6:8 this is clearly the case: what is signified in these passages is not 'hell' as normally understood, but the state of being physically dead.

At other times, however, the word '*She'ol*' can have the more restricted meaning of 'the grave', as in Job 7:9 and Genesis 37:35. One Watchtower article ridiculed the doctrine of eternal hell by suggesting that, according to this latter verse, when Jacob died he

went bodily into hell (*She'ol*).[31] This is a biased judgement, however, for in this and a few other contexts in Scripture the word *'She'ol'* simply means 'the grave'.

But, thirdly, these words are also used in passages where 'hell' is clearly in view. For example, in Psalm 9:17 God warns the ungodly of their future punishment. A powerful contrast is drawn here between the destiny of wicked nations who ignore and rebel against God and believers who trust God in their need and anticipate future glory. The Hebrew employment of the tenth and eleventh letters in the Hebrew alphabet serve to reinforce this contrast in verses 17–18. Again, in Deuteronomy 32:22 we are told that the wrath of God burns in *She'ol.* Likewise, in at least six out of the ten New Testament references, *Hades* is used in this sense with the most obvious example being Luke 16:23, where Dives is described as 'being in torments in *Hades* …'

One argument used by some Conditionalists against the orthodox doctrine of hell is that the word used by the Lord Jesus here is *Hades* rather than *Gehenna*. They go further in their argument by referring to Revelation 20:14 where we are informed that even *Hades* will be cast one day into the lake of fire. Their claim is that the Luke 16 passage is pictorial rather than literal. Two comments must suffice here: In the first place, our Lord's use of the word *'Hades'* rather than '*Gehenna'* in Luke 16:23 does not constitute an argument against eternal punishment, for the former term is more frequently used to denote hell than to denote the state of death. Secondly, what the word 'Hades' signifies in Revelation 20:14 is the state of death which results from the cessation of physical life.

The Lord Jesus in his human nature was in *Hades,* that is, in a state of physical death, whereas his *'Gehenna'* was experienced on the cross, where he drank to the full the cup of the Father's wrath against sinners. Peter reminds us in Acts 2 that it was impossible

for Hades to hold the Son of God indefinitely (verse 24). Christ rose from the dead, and now, according to Revelation 1:18, he has 'the keys of Hades and of Death'. With reference to this statement, Hendriksen asks, 'Does not the Son of Man reveal that He has the keys of death whenever He welcomes the soul of a believer into heaven? And does He not prove that He has the keys of Hades when at His second coming He reunites the soul and body of the believer, a body now gloriously transformed?'[32]

With respect to Revelation 20:14, the context is that of judgement and the general resurrection of the dead which will take place at the last day. The sea is pictured as giving up all its dead; so also do death (here it refers to the separation of soul and body) and *Hades* which is the state of separation. In this sense both death and Hades no longer exist after the last day, for never again, either in heaven or in hell, will there be a separation between body and soul. Therefore in graphic, pictorial language, death and *Hades* are described as being cast into the lake of fire. 'In the Old Testament the word *she'ol* is used more often for grave and less often for hell, while in the corresponding use of *Hades* in the New Testament the contrary holds.'[33] This conclusion is fair and responsible, allowing for the varied use of these two words in the Bible. Hendriksen sheds further light on our understanding of '*Hades*'. He argues that when the word is used in relation to the intermediate state, it refers to 'the abode of the *souls* of the wicked *before* the judgement day'; whereas when the word *'Gehenna'* is used, 'the reference is *generally* to the abode of the wicked, *body and soul, after* the judgement day.'[34]

Gehenna

Gehenna was the name of a valley south-west of Jerusalem where children had once been sacrificed by fire to a pagan idol named Molech. King Josiah later desecrated this pagan site, and it was

then used for the burning of the city's rubbish and offal. The name was used in New Testament times as a symbol of future and eternal punishment, but several of the twelve references to Gehenna in the New Testament support Hendriksen's contention. The word is used seven times by Matthew but note especially Matthew 10:28—'And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' *Gehenna* is also used three times in Mark 9:43–47, where a vivid contrast is drawn between hell and eternal life—the only alternative destinies facing mankind.

Summary

We can now say by way of summary that *She'ol* and *Hades* refer to the grave as well as to the state of death, but that they also refer sometimes to the state of the ungodly in hell. While *She'ol* is used less frequently for hell in the Old Testament, *Hades* carries the meaning of hell more frequently in the New Testament, referring to the abode and punishment of the ungodly before the general resurrection of the body. *Gehenna* describes the same place, that is, hell, but includes in it—which is unique to the term *Gehenna*—the punishment of both body and soul which will occur immediately after the personal return of the Lord Jesus in glory and the final judgement.

Urgency

Against this background we can appreciate the urgency and directness which characterized the proclamation of the gospel in the New Testament. Sinners are in the greatest danger, for hell awaits them unless they believe in Christ. This is precisely what our Lord did. 'And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul,' our Saviour taught. 'But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matthew 10:28). Again, he

warned, 'if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched …' (Mark 9:43,44).

In some of his parables, too, such warnings are clearly expressed. The parable of the wheat and tares concludes with these words: 'The Son of man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness; and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 13:41,42. See also Matthew 13:49,50; Luke 13:1–5; 16:23–24; John 5:28–29).

Notice three points here: in the majority of these references the Lord Jesus was instructing and warning his followers, informing them in detail of eternal issues such as life and death, heaven, hell and the end of the world. Our Lord did not shrink from emphasizing hell in His ministry; in fact, He frequently used imagery and symbolism to convey to His listeners a sense of its awfulness. Our Lord preached this and other doctrines authoritatively. Our Lord and the apostles, then, held out one of two possible destinies for mankind—heaven or hell, life or death. We all stand on the brink of this eternity, and these are the only alternatives before us—-heaven or hell. Beyond death there are no further opportunities of salvation for unbelievers. All this adds to the seriousness and urgency of our work as preachers. In the next chapter we will consider what hell is like.

Review

1. Explore in detail the New Testament references in which *hades* is used.

2. Are you persuaded that the word is used at times in relation to hell?

3. Describe the significance of the way the word Gehenna is used in the New Testament.

Chapter Eight
Hell: separation and punishment.

How does the New Testament describe hell? This is the question we now answer in considering some biblical descriptions of hell under the headings of separation and punishment. While these are interrelated, it is convenient for us to distinguish them for the purpose of clarity.

Separation

Paul's statement in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, that unbelievers 'shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power', underlines the fact that *separation* is an essential feature of hell. The verb 'punished' here

means 'to pay a penalty', which is then specified as 'everlasting destruction'. Although this phrase is found nowhere else in the New Testament, it is a phrase which has been used to support the theory of annihilation. However, the Greek word *olethros* (translated 'destruction' in the AV and NKJV) is qualified by the adjective *aiónios* ('eternal'), which stresses the idea of duration rather than extinction. Furthermore, the phrase is immediately amplified in the following words, 'from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power'. Extinction is not taught here, but rather a definite severance on the part of unbelievers from the presence and glory of Christ, which represents the opposite of everlasting life. Originally the Greek word here translated 'power' was used to describe the authority and power exercised by magistrates while its related adjective *ischuros* was used of an army or a fortress. Unbelievers, says the apostle Paul, will be separated from the splendour and glory of this power which belongs to Christ inherently, and which he uses especially on behalf of the elect to effect their salvation and glorification.

Our Lord also uses this principle of separation to describe the nature of hell. At the last day, for example, he will show great wrath towards the unbelieving despite their gifts and miraculous works, saying, 'I never knew you: depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness ' (Matthew 7:23). 'They that would not *come to* Him to be saved', remarks Matthew Henry, 'must *depart from* Him to be damned. To *depart from* Christ is the very hell of hell; it is the foundation of all the misery of the damned, to be cut off from all hope of benefit from Christ and His mediation.'[35]

Later in Matthew's Gospel we find our Lord's words, 'Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:41). Here separation is shown to be the exact opposite of inheriting 'the kingdom' (v.34) and 'eternal life' (v.46),

while separation itself involves 'everlasting punishment' (v.46). To depart from Christ does not mean that in hell sinners are banished from the presence of God, for God is omnipresent; it does mean, however, that they are separated from the presence of His love. To be in the presence of God without a Saviour is to be in hell, for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

God's love and kindness towards mankind mean that unbelievers can live happy, meaningful lives here, being well-provided for by God in His providence. In expounding part of the section on Providence in the Westminster Confession of Faith, A. A. Hodge writes:

> Thus also the providential government of God over mankind in general is subordinate as a means to an end to His gracious providence toward His Church, whereby He gathers it out of every people and nation, and makes all things work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose … The history of redemption through all its dispensations—Patriarchal, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Christian, is the key to the philosophy of human history in general. The race is preserved, continents and islands are settled with inhabitants, nations are elevated to empires, philosophy and the practical arts, civilization and liberty are advanced but ultimately in order that the Church, the Lamb's bride, may be perfected in all her members and adorned for her Husband.

Therefore there is a special care that the Lord shows towards his believing people, and for this reason unbelievers benefit greatly from the presence of the church in the world. During World War II my father worked on the railway in North Wales and England. For a period he helped to transport by rail British and, later, American, military personnel regularly in England and Scotland. After being away from home for three or four days he would return with a bag full of 'goodies' that excited us as children. In that bag were lots of chocolates, sweets, varieties of wrapped biscuits and chewing-

gum which he then emptied on the kitchen table for us to see and admire. With war-time rationing in the UK, this was a treat but we were only allowed a couple of these each day! The American military personnel shared these things with my father because he was kind to them; at times on the journey, he would sit with them exchanging family news and history, often describing places on the journey. Before they left the train they lavished these goodies on my father who brought them home for his children. My father was not an American, nor was he a soldier, but he benefited greatly from the American presence in our country at that time.

This is a picture of God's dealings with the world. Unbelievers are not part of the living church of Jesus Christ; it is believers whom the Lord especially loves, yet unbelievers too benefit greatly from God's love and his care for the world. Here unbelievers can be happy and find enjoyment and fulfilment in God-given relationships and responsibilities. They enjoy God's creation ordinances of marriage and work as well as God-given gifts of families, rain/sunshine, the changing seasons, then peace, liberty and protection secured by those appointed by God as magistrates, government and kings/presidents. By contrast, in hell unbelievers are deprived of all these expressions of divine love and kindness. Hell represents separation from the love and favour of God, so that the ungodly in hell will be exposed to his wrath without any mercy at all.

Punishment

The New Testament also emphasizes the fact that sinners are *punished* in hell by God.

In Matthew 25:46 the Lord Jesus describes the fate of the ungodly as that of 'everlasting punishment'. The significance of the adjective *aiónios* will be considered later, but I want here to

indicate the significance of the Greek word *kolasis*, translated 'punishment'.[36]

The word is used in its verbal form in Acts 4:21, where we are told that the Sanhedrin tried in vain to obtain evidence on which they could lawfully *punish* Peter and John. It is also used in 2 Peter 2:9, with reference to the unjust being reserved *in punishment* until the final judgement. In this latter reference it is important to note that the verb is in the present tense and the passive voice, giving the sense 'are being punished'. It means that the ungodly are being punished both in the world and also in hell, but after the final judgement they will receive the full measure of their punishment. Again, the word occurs in 1 John 4:18, where we read that 'fear has to do with punishment' (NIV).

'Punishment', then, and not 'cutting-off', is the correct translation of the word *kolasis* in Matthew 25:46, and it is this concept of punishment that is used by the Lord Jesus and by the apostle Peter to describe the nature and purpose of hell's sufferings.

Today the idea of punishment is frowned upon. Prison sentences are regarded as reformatory and educative rather than punitive. Within education punishment has been largely withdrawn, and parents are discouraged by psychiatrists and sociologists from 'punishing' their children. Religious education specialists tell us we should withhold biblical material, whether stories or teaching, which includes suggestions of violence or death—and this despite the fact that children are familiar with TV and DVD 'thrillers', football hooliganism, terrorist atrocities and, more recently, street violence! Some children also see their mothers and other relatives being physically beaten at home by cruel, often drunken, men.

How do we communicate the truth of eternal punishment in this contemporary situation? Where do we begin? We must begin with God and His Word, for punishment is an integral

part of God's justice. His rectorial justice has instituted a moral government in the world, and God decrees that this should be exercised, through parents, magistrates, governments and kings, etc. But there is another aspect to His justice, namely, His distributive justice, in which He executes his law and distributes rewards and punishments to both humans and angels. In his wrath He inflicts penalties justly on sinners, through parents, civil authorities, and even by means of the actual consequences of our own sins, as well as through various material and physical judgements. Hell, however, is the climax of this distributive or retributive justice. Rather than being offensive and an unnecessary addendum to life, it is the continuation of a principle God already upholds within the world, and without which social life would deteriorate into anarchy.

What constitutes the punishment of hell?

Our Lord tells us that the soul and, eventually, the body are involved in punishment; consider, for example, Matthew 10:28 and Mark 9:43–45. Writing early in eighteenth-century Wales, the Rev. Jenkin Jones remarked that hell's punishment will be terrible not only 'because of the loss the sinner will suffer in the body and soul there, but also the loss he will suffer in *every* part of *both* body and soul. Not only will the unbeliever be in hell, but hell will be in him too'[37]—in his conscience, in his body and in his soul.

Conscience will inflict its own punishment on sinners in hell. John Flavel writes:

> Conscience, which should have been the sinner's curb on earth, becomes the whip that must lash his soul in hell … That which was the seat and centre of all guilt, now becomes the seat and the centre of all torments … should the Lord let a sinner's conscience fly upon him with rage … it would put him into a hell upon earth … But he keeps a hand of restraint upon them … But no sooner is

> the Christless soul turned out of the body … but the conscience is roused and put into a rage never to be appeased any more[38]

(see Mark 9:44: 'their worm does not die', a reference to a condemning conscience persisting throughout eternity).

Punishment in hell is also described as 'everlasting fire' (Matthew 18:8), 'the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:46), 'flaming fire' (2 Thessalonians 1:8), 'eternal fire' (Jude 7). We are told that 'the smoke of their torment ascends for ever and ever' (Revelation 14:11; 19:3). Dives was also 'in torments' and 'in this flame' (Luke 16:23,24), while the devil, the beast and the false prophet 'will be tormented day and night for ever and ever' (Revelation 20:10). Thomas Boston describes these torments as being universal (that is, every part of the person is affected), manifold, uninterrupted, unpitied and eternal.[39] In addition to pangs of conscience, references like Matthew 8:12 and 13:50, Mark 9:43–48, Luke 16:23–28, Revelation 14:10 and 21:8 underline other subjective punishments, such as anguish, despair, weeping and gnashing of teeth, which will constitute an essential part of hell's punishment after death for unbelievers.

John Owen, the Puritan theologian, was clear that, 'By "hell-fire" we understand nothing but the "wrath of God" for sin; into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall, our God being a consuming fire.'[40] Jonathan Edwards also stresses that the all-important feature of heaven and hell is God Himself. God makes hell and he is hell: 'God will be the hell of one and the heaven of the other … 'Tis the infinite almighty God that shall become the fire of the furnace'[41] and, figuratively speaking, the wrath of God is a consuming fire.

Personally, I welcome the emphasis of Owen and Edwards, namely, that God Himself is a consuming fire to the ungodly. This God-centred approach needs to be stressed in our preaching of hell. In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, Hendriksen issues what is

a much needed warning. With reference to the phrase 'in flaming fire' (2 Thessalonians 1:7) he says:

> To speak about a 'mere' symbol in such connections is never right. The reality which answers to the symbol is always far more terrible (or far more glorious) than the symbol itself. Human language is stretched almost to its breaking-point in order to convey the terrible character of the coming of the Lord in relation to the wicked.[42]

That 'everlasting fire' involves suffering is emphasized in the New Testament as in Revelation 20:10. However, the Lord also teaches there will be *degrees of punishment* in hell. In Matthew 10:14, for example, referring to the custom amongst the Jews of removing the dust from their clothes and sandals after travelling through a pagan area, the Lord warns that even a Jewish city or house can be unclean if it refuses to welcome the gospel. When people refuse to hear the gospel, he tells the disciples, they too must indicate that such people are pagans by turning from them and shaking the dust from off their feet (cf. Acts 13:50,51). Those who spurn the gospel are here warned that they will be punished more severely in the final judgement than the notoriously wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This point is reiterated in Matthew 11:22–24 with reference to the unbelief of people living in Capernaum. Despite our Lord's great Galilean ministry, involving a lengthy period of residence and ministry there and including numerous miracles, the inhabitants had not repented. These mighty works performed by Christ amongst them should have caused them to repent, and the Lord warned them. He then explained this fact in greater detail in Luke 12:47,48—'... For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required ...' Here we can underline the following principles.

First of all, ignorance, though it is inexcusable and punishable, will nevertheless be punished less severely in hell. This is an important principle, for it is suggested by some, that people are unworthy of punishment until they hear and reject the Word. If true, it would be a powerful reason for disengaging the church from its task of world mission. But it is clear from Scripture that all people are already condemned in Adam and will be judged and punished righteously by the Lord.

Secondly, increased knowledge implies increased responsibility: the greater the light, the greater will be the liability and punishment. In the next chapter we will consider the eternity of hell.

Review

1. How do the statements in Matthew 7:23, 25:46 and 2 Thessalonians 1:9 help us to understand the nature of hell?
2. What light, if any, does Hebrews 12:29 throw on the subject of hell's punishment?

Chapter Nine
Hell: its duration

In considering this aspect of the subject we need first to begin with the Greek word *aiónios* as used, for example, in the phrase 'everlasting punishment' (Matthew 25:46). This word and its cognates are used 71 times in the New Testament. While it sometimes denotes an 'age' or an indefinite period of time, it is used in the majority of cases in the New Testament in the sense of 'everlasting'. For example, both in Romans 16:26 and in 1 Timothy 1:17 the word expresses the eternity of God; in Hebrews 9:14 it describes the eternal Spirit, and in Revelation 1:18 the endless reign of Christ. On 51 occasions the word is used to describe the unending bliss of the redeemed in heaven. The fact that this same word is used twice in Matthew 25:46, both to describe the duration of 'eternal life' and to describe the duration of hell, means that one

cannot escape the conclusion that when descriptive of hell it has the sense of 'everlasting'.

Augustine has a helpful statement on this discussion of the meaning of *aiónios*:

> What a thing it is, to account eternal punishment to be a fire of long duration, and eternal life to be without end, since Christ comprised both in that very same place, in one and the same sentence, saying, 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal'! If both are eternal, either both must be understood to be lasting with an end, or both perpetual without an end. For like is related to like; on the one side, eternal punishment, on the other, eternal life. But to say in one and the same sentence, life eternal shall be without end, punishment eternal shall have an end, were too absurd: whence, since the eternal life of the saints shall be without end, punishment eternal, too, shall doubtless have no end to those whose it shall be.[43]

Writing much later than Augustine, the Rev. E. B. Pusey, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, expressed his exasperation in 1880 with the way people played fast and loose with the inspired words of Scripture: 'They who deny that any of the words used of future punishment in Holy Scripture express eternity, would do well to consider, whether there is any way, in which Almighty God *could* have expressed it, which they would have accepted, as meaning it!'[44]

The conclusion, however, that *aiónios* means 'everlasting' in relation to hell, is questioned by advocates of Conditional Immortality. They argue that eternal punishment is eternal in its *effects* but *not in its suffering*. On this interpretation they deny the immortality of the soul and affirm the annihilation of the unbelieving at death.

Immortality

Consider *the immortality of the soul*[45] which is assumed in the Bible, although not explicitly stated. What of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 6:16 concerning God, 'who alone has immortality'? While endless existence is implied here, states Hendriksen, this does not exhaust its meaning, for 'the concept *immortality* ... means that God is life's never-failing Fountain'.[46] In this double sense, only God has immortality in and of Himself. We can add that all people are created in the image of God and thereby capable of unending existence, even in hell. It is believers, however, who exclusively enjoy eternal life in the sense of the duration and fulness/blessedness of life which has been brought to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:16). 'For the believer', concludes Hendriksen, 'immortality is therefore a redemptive concept. It is *everlasting salvation.* For God it is *eternal blessedness.* But while the believer *has received* immortality, as one receives a drink of water from a fountain, God *has* it. It belongs to His very Being. He *is* Himself the Fountain.'[47]

Those supporting annihilation claim that descriptive terms like 'death', 'destruction', 'perishing' and 'fire' suggest an end. To answer this point, consider, for example, one of these words, the Greek verb *apollumi* which is translated 'destroy' in Matthew 10:28. The word occurs 85 times in the New Testament and is translated variously as 'lose', 'perish' or 'destroy' in the Authorised Version, but nowhere does it mean annihilation.

For example, in 2 Peter 3:6 Peter says that 'the world ... being overflowed with water, perished'(*apoleto*). The world did not become extinct in or after the Flood! Rather than being destroyed in that absolute sense, the world was preserved by God. Quoting Psalm 102, Hebrews 1:11,12 tells us in reference to creation, 'They shall perish' (*apolountai*); but we are told that God will 'change', not obliterate, the earth and the heavens. Similarly, we are told in Luke

19:10 that our Lord came 'to save that which was lost' (*apolōlos*), and clearly it would be absurd to interpret this as meaning extinction.

To enforce the correctness of this exegesis, notice that the Bible consistently speaks of suffering and loss rather than annihilation after death for unbelievers. Furthermore, the fact that there are degrees of punishment in hell is incompatible with annihilation. Coupled with the force and use of the adjective *aiónios* and the fact that the character of sinners in hell does not change, thereby incurring God's wrath eternally, we must conclude that annihilation has no biblical warrant whatsoever.

Bishop Ryle's summary of the biblical position deserves mention:

> The misery of the lost, and the blessedness of the saved, are both alike for ever: let no man deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture: the eternity of God, and heaven, and hell, all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal, so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day.[48]

It is difficult for humans, bounded as we are by space and time, to conceive of eternity as being timeless, and we can agree with Jonathan Edwards's statement that we have no positive idea of hell's eternity: 'It is that duration that has no end', and then, after listing several negative and positive qualities of hell, he repeats, 'eternal means there will be no end'.[49] Again, in struggling to explain the eternity of hell, Edwards adds that 'all arithmetic here fails, no rules of multiplication can reach the amount, for there is no end'.[50]

Thomas Boston was naturally compelled like us to use the time-category to describe the eternity of the unbeliever's misery in hell. He makes two brief statements concerning it: first, it has a beginning; secondly, it will never have an end. 'Wherefore eternity, which is before us,' writes Boston, 'is a duration that has a beginning but no end.' He then qualifies that statement: 'It is a

beginning without a middle, a beginning without an end … There is no end of it: while God is, it shall be.'[51]

The eternity of hell should make us more zealous in telling people of the only One who is able to rescue them. Do we shrink from declaring these solemn truths? Remember that God will be glorified even in the future destinies of believers and unbelievers. What is supreme in the purpose of God in election and reprobation is His own glory; hell also will glorify the justice, power and wrath of God throughout eternity. In the meantime it is our responsibility to pray and work for the salvation of sinners before such an awful destiny overtakes them.

We turn in the next chapter to consider further the pastoral challenge of this teaching before outlining in the following chapter the way in which the Lord Jesus taught the subject.

Review

1. Describe as biblically as possible the teaching known as the immortality of the soul.
2. Reflect on the biblical evidence for the eternity of hell.

Chapter Ten
Hell: its challenge

We can now apply the doctrine of hell in a little more detail to evangelistic preaching, and to the need for compassion and zeal in reaching hell-bound sinners with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Caution

First of all, however, I want to sound a note of warning concerning the implications of rejecting or modifying the orthodox, biblical doctrine of hell. To those tempted to abandon the traditional view, John W. Wenham provided a much needed caution. He warned for example, of the danger of twisting clear statements of Scripture, and allowing our thinking to be dominated by contemporary thought rather than by the Word of God. Wenham also observed that the revival of Conditionalism in the twentieth-

century was pioneered largely by Socinians[52] and Arians,[53] who at the same time rejected such fundamental doctrines as the deity of Christ. 'Be wary', he adds, 'of such bedfellows.'[54] That 'Jehovah's Witnesses', Christadelphians and Seventh Day Adventists all teach Conditionalism rather than eternal punishment is significant, and this fact is a warning to Christians not to compromise with biblical truth.

The rejection of the orthodox teaching concerning hell often involves the rejection of other foundational truths. A writer in the *Christian Remembrancer* for April 1863 confirms this fact and avows that 'we have not been able to discover a single impugner of the dogma of eternal punishment who is consistent in his denial, and at the same time orthodox'. Seventeen years later, E. M. Goulbourn made the same point, but in more detail:

> It is a dangerous thing to meddle with the theology of the Bible; because all its doctrines, though many of them soar far beyond us into the region of mystery, are yet so wonderfully coherent that to touch one is to imperil the rest. Scriptural theology resembles an arch, so constructed that all the great stones shall be key-stones. Displace any of these stones, and you will find that the whole fabric falls to pieces under your hands. Dislodge the doctrine of eternal punishment from the system of scriptural theology, and you will find, if you employ against it similar objections, that the Atonement itself begins to give way; for if you are determined to reject the idea of a finite sin having an infinite penalty, you will find it at least equally hard, or even more hard, to understand how a finite sin can demand an infinitely precious Sacrifice. But the Atonement is not the only fundamental doctrine which you shake by dislodging that of eternal punishment.[55]

Church history over the past hundred and fifty years confirms Goulbourn's statement. When churches adopted a more critical attitude towards the Bible, one of the first casualties was the

doctrine of eternal punishment, followed by the atonement and the miraculous elements in the Bible. It is essential, then, for believers to be vigilant and to recognise the inter-relatedness of this doctrine with other key doctrines such as the Trinity, the atonement and Scripture.

Evangelistic preaching

This doctrine also has a bearing upon the content and urgency of evangelistic preaching. Although as preachers we may not *deny* the doctrine of hell, yet we still need to ask whether we preach it with the clarity, frequency and urgency that is demanded of us. 'The hearers are led to deny the truth which the preacher leaves out of his sermon,' was the perceptive observation of John Elias, to which he added, 'Omitting any truth intentionally in a sermon leads to the denial of it.'[56] In the same context Elias speaks of the deficiencies in many preachers. He laments the fact, for example, that 'It is not plainly declared that all the human race are by nature "the children of wrath", and that the "sentence of condemnation" is passed on every one; that none can save himself; that no one deserves to be rescued, and that none will come to Christ to have life.'[57] We need to examine our preaching in the light of this lament, for we may believe the right things about hell, and yet fail to preach it as an integral part of the gospel message. The warning of Professor John Murray at this point is pertinent:

> A conspicuous defect ... is the absence of warning and of condemnation in evangelistic effort. The naturalistic temper of our age, united with its callousness, makes the doctrine of hell peculiarly uncongenial. It is more often the subject of crude jest than it is of solemn warning or foreboding. The supposed politeness of modern etiquette has too often succeeded in creating the sentiment that any serious reference to hell and damnation is not accordant with the

canons of good taste. These evils have in many cases ensnared even the orthodox.

> But hell is an unspeakable reality and, if evangelism is to march on its way, it must by God's grace produce that sense of condemnation complexioned by the apprehension of perdition as the due reward of sin. For it is in the anguish of such a sense of condemnation, in the anguish of a conscience that stings with the apprehension of the wrath and curse of God, that the gospel of God's free grace becomes as cold water to a thirsty soul and as good news from a far country.[58]

We must then be thoroughly biblical and orthodox in doctrine and, at the same time, faithful in the proclamation of this divinely given message.

Our attention can now be turned to such aspects as warning, simplicity and directness in the preaching of hell, as well as the need of compassion for the lost.

Warning

The note of warning must be sounded loud and clear in our preaching. Although we are occasionally accused of using the doctrines of wrath and hell in order to frighten people into the kingdom of God, our real purpose is to warn sinners of their urgent need to trust in Christ for salvation. Furthermore, this is something which God commands us to do. It was God who warned Adam and Eve of the punishment their sin would receive. He also sent Jonah to warn Nineveh of impending judgement; and Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry frequently warned people of the consequences of unbelief and sin (see, for example, Matthew 7:13–14; Luke 13:1–5, and John 3:15–18). However, we sometimes feel unsure as to the way in which we should issue this warning to sinners, and we need both encouragement and guidance.

Compassion

Some of the Welsh preachers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were masters in the art of applying the gospel to their hearers. One of them, Jenkin Jones, an Arminian, was a popular and effective preacher of the gospel. Ordained in 1726 to the Welsh Congregational ministry in West Wales, he had a passion and zeal for unbelievers, and this was naturally expressed in his preaching and writing. Picturing the separation of believers and unbelievers at the second coming of the Lord, he describes the reaction of unbelievers when they see the elect taken up into the air to be with Christ: 'O! take us up with you. What are you doing leaving us behind?' At this point the preacher hears their cry of anguish and replies:

> What can I do now for you? I must tell you that I told you these things before, but you did not consider them. I called you to repentance and preached Christ to you and showed to you the way of salvation, but you did not accept Him … O, what can I do with you now? … Now it is too late … What can I do? You know how I endangered my life because of you to preach to you … but now the treasury of the gospel is sealed up and the day of grace has passed …[59]

Repeatedly the preacher expressed his anguish and perplexity as he saw unbelievers being separated from the elect and later sent to hell. In this man's ministry there was much more than directness, simplicity and application; his heart was burning with compassion for unbelievers, in the realization of their awful danger outside of Christ.

Is it not here many of us fail? Applying the gospel and pleading with sinners is more than a technique and more than oratory; it is essentially the language of a heart stirred and deeply affected by the gospel. Paradoxically, orthodoxy is both essential and inadequate,

for the truth must also be *felt* by the preacher before he will be able to warn and exhort sinners effectively. In other words, if the gospel is to be preached as God intends it, the essential qualities required are compassion coupled with a deep sense of urgency then dependence on God. Here and now God intends that His people love and care for unbelievers. There is no excuse for indifference or cold professionalism amongst preachers. Our hearts need to throb with the love of God. Dare we speak of the Lord's infinite love and the Saviour's glorious sacrifice with lips and hearts unmoved towards unbelievers? Compassion is required of us *now*, before it is too late. Compassion for unbelievers is confined to this world, where the doors of heaven remain open to repenting sinners.

During his first furlough in England, Hudson Taylor addressed a large missionary conference in Scotland. He began by relating the story of a Chinese man who fell into a dangerous river in China and was allowed to drown by indifferent onlookers. The conference members were disgusted to hear of this callous indifference on the part of the bystanders. Hudson Taylor lost no time in applying his illustration. 'You are very upset by their refusal to rescue a drowning man from physical death,' he said, 'but what of your indifference to the spiritual death and hopelessness of thousands and thousands who die each year in China without ever hearing of the Lord Jesus?'

Hell is an awful reality, and without Christ it is to hell that men and women will go, whether they live in China or Wales or any other part of the world. Brethren, I plead with you as preachers of the gospel to love and warn and rescue people from hell. I know it is only God who saves, but do not hide behind the sovereignty of God. The sovereign God who elects sinners has also sovereignly appointed prayer, preaching, and witnessing as the means by which he gathers his elect, and we must therefore be diligent and zealous in using these means.

Compassion belongs to the very nature of God, and only God can give it to his people. But the challenge remains. Are we imploring God for more of his compassion? Do we repent of our indifference and professionalism? Are our hearts and lives right before Him? One thing is clear. The days, months and years are speeding by for us as preachers too. Soon our ministries will end and 'every man's work shall be made manifest'. Our responsibilities are onerous and it is time to reappraise our ministries and our priorities, and to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord and his gospel for the salvation of unbelievers before the end comes.

Review

1. What is evangelistic preaching?
2. To what extent is my preaching evangelistic?
3. Identify any challenges you face in preaching the Gospel and any steps you can take to respond.

Chapter Eleven
The Lord's own example

After outlining the biblical teaching concerning the wrath of God, judgement and hell in earlier chapters, and suggesting ways in which we are to preach these truths, I continue our study by surveying New Testament data concerning the subject. Such a study ought to have priority for preachers because it points to the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught this doctrine. This can be a profitable exercise as there is much to learn from the Lord's example and that of the apostles. It is the New Testament only which we are concerned with in this chapter as we survey its references to hell. Our plan is to highlight the location, imagery, context and purpose of these references.

Location

The majority of direct references to hell in the New Testament come from the lips of the Lord Jesus. For many, this may appear to be a surprising and staggering fact. Decades ago, for example, pastors were taught by critically minded theology professors that it was the apostle Paul who complicated the 'simple' gospel which the Lord Jesus had preached. What the apostle did was to spoil and complicate Christ's message and teaching by introducing harsh concepts like hell and judgement. Their assumptions were challenged but this mistaken belief held sway so that many pastors left their seminaries to teach such ideas. But it is difficult to see how scholars and even pastors could have reached such conclusions if they were familiar with the New Testament. Few were self-critical regarding the imposition of this critical framework on the New Testament. But the evidence contradicts their critical claims. In fact, the references to hell in the New Testament are located predominantly in the Synoptic Gospels rather than in the letters of Paul. Donald Guthrie remarked:

> 'There is no way of avoiding the conclusion that Jesus firmly accepted that there was a counterpart to heaven for those who were condemned before God … If Jesus' words are given their face value, hell becomes a terrifying reality.'[60]

Note the following important facts:

- There are no direct, clear references to hell in the Acts of the Apostles.
- In the rest of the New Testament, numerous statements and phrases imply or assume the eternal punishment of sinners in hell.
- Yet there are only approximately eleven direct references to the subject to be found from Romans to Revelation.

- Almost all these references from Romans to Revelation are used in the context of encouraging and teaching believers.

W.G.T. Shedd is correct, therefore, when he affirms:

> The strongest support of the doctrine of Endless Punishment is the teaching of Christ … Christ could not have warned men so frequently and earnestly as he did against 'the fire that shall never be quenched' and 'the worm that dieth not', had he not known that there is no future peril to fully correspond to them … Jesus Christ is the Person who is responsible for the doctrine of Eternal Perdition. He is the Being with whom all opponents of this theological tenet are in conflict.[61]

Imagery

Historically, preachers and theologians have tended to make extended use of imagery to describe the awfulness of hell and some of their imagery has been fanciful and unacceptable. By contrast, the use of imagery in the New Testament in relation to hell is controlled and reserved for specific situations and audiences. Rather than being used extensively and colourfully, it is comparatively limited yet firm in its Old Testament background. We must note here some more interesting facts concerning this biblical data:

- Our Lord uses more imagery than any one else in the New Testament.
- However, out of eighteen references the Lord Jesus makes to Final Judgement and Hell, only four of them contain imagery in any significant degree.
- The latter four references are Matthew 8:12, 13:36–43, Mark 9:43–48 and Luke 16:19–31.The latter is an exceptional, crucial passage which must be considered, albeit briefly.

- Matthew 13:36–43 is our Lord's explanation to the disciples of the parable of the wheat and the tares.
- Under the next point, I will show how the Lord's use of imagery is purposeful and directly related to the condition and attitude of his audience; this will be illustrated with reference to Matthew 8:12, Mark 9:43–48 and Luke 16:19–31.

Warning:

Considerable caution is required by preachers in describing hell because of the danger of speculating and misleading people into thinking that our word pictures apply physically and literally to hell. Earlier, we saw that the most important feature of heaven and hell is God himself. It is the majestic, holy God who makes hell so frightening for unbelievers. By contrast, he is the glory and bliss of heaven as believers enjoy, worship and serve him unhindered. Returning to the biblical imagery used in describing hell, 'hell-fire' needs to be understood metaphorically rather than literally.

With reference to the phrase, 'in flaming fire' in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Hendriksen warns us: 'The reality which answers to the symbol is always far more terrible than the symbol itself. Human language is stretched almost to its breaking point'[62] in order to convey the terrible character of the wrath of God.

While all the latter references to the Lord's teaching on this subject are warnings to people yet it is essential to notice that the warnings increase both in severity and in the amount of attention given to hell depending on the attitude of those listening to the Lord.

Matthew 8:12

For example, Matthew 8:12 was spoken in the context of the healing of the centurion's servant.

Two things need to be underlined here. One, the centurion's faith was such that our Saviour declares, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not even in Israel'. Two, the miracle was performed in Capernaum where there was extensive unbelief and the Lord warns in 11:23–24 that it will be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgement than for Capernaum. It is these unbelieving people who have listened regularly to Christ and witnessed his miracles who are warned in Matthew 8:12 about hell. Such people will be 'cast out into outer darkness There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'. The 'weeping' refers to 'inconsolable, never ending wretchedness and utter, everlasting helplessness' while the 'gnashing of teeth' denotes 'excruciating pain and frenzied anger'.[63]

Luke 13:1–5

The situation in Luke 13:1–5 is different. Our Lord uses the people's concern and curiosity concerning two tragedies to call for repentance, otherwise 'you will all likewise perish'. There appears to be an absence of hardness on the part of his hearers and more a concern and curiosity as to why the two tragedies had occurred. In a superbly masterful manner, the Lord refused to answer their curiosity apart from denying that those who died in the tragedies were more sinful than anyone else. Nor did he enter into a discussion of suffering but rather commanded the people to repent as a matter of urgency. The call to repent was enforced by lifting their thoughts from earthly disasters to one far more terrible but which awaits unbelievers beyond physical death.

Luke 16:19–31

We must return to this exceptional passage in Luke 16:19–31 as many find it extremely difficult to cope with so they either trivialise it, employ a 'reductionist' methodology or reduce it to a parable in which the details cannot be pressed.

We can ask several questions concerning these verses:

a. What is the context and purpose of our Lord's words here?

After the key division of 9:51, we enter upon the central section of Luke's gospel until chapter 18. Although the Cross is approaching yet there is much work left for the Saviour still to do. However, there is increasing opposition towards him especially from the Pharisees and other religious leaders (see 11:15, 38, 53–54, 13:31, 14:1, 15:2 and 16:14). The tragedy was that they had listened regularly to his ministry and witnessed many of his miracles. Overhearing the Son of God teaching his disciples in 16:1–13, the Pharisees once again 'derided Him' (verse 14). It is at this very point that the Lord Jesus proceeded to expose their behaviour and hypocrisy as being 'covetous' (verse 14). They thought that they served God; they did so of course but only formally and outwardly. In reality they were lovers of money. Their hearts and attitudes as well as values and behaviour were controlled by a passion for money.

b. If they do not repent, what will happen to them?

This is made clear in 16:19–31 where they are warned and given the most detailed account of the after-life that the Lord Jesus ever gave in the Gospels.

c. Are we to understand the passage as a parable?

No, clearly this is not a parable. There are reasons for this negative answer. One reason is because all the Lord's parables are confined to people, incidents and details in this life, and never in the after-life.

That point must be emphasised. Further, individuals are never named by the Lord in his parables; rather he refers to a king, a landowner, a sower, the rich fool, the faithful and evil servants, or

the unjust steward. He never names characters in his parables. I submit then that Luke 16:19–31 is NOT a parable.

d. How are we to understand the passage?

The Lord is teaching by way of analogy and, while some details cannot be pressed, he is telling us what happens after death.

e. What principles are being delineated in these verses?

There are three principles that can be identified, namely: the conscious continuing existence of unbelievers and believers after death, the suffering of unbelievers in hell, here described as *hades* and, finally, their irreversible state. There is no escape from hell and no purgatory with an eventual exit.

f. To summarise:

- When our Lord refers to hell while speaking to a group wider than that of the disciples, it is always for the purpose of warning.
- But that is not all. The Son of God used the teaching of hell sensitively and variedly, depending on the condition and attitude of his congregation. He did not go around indiscriminately preaching hell.
- Rather, he knew his audiences well and used the doctrine of hell usually after they had been under his teaching for some time and when there was hardening and/or mounting opposition.
- The Lord's use of imagery concerning hell is also limited; he normally underlines the fact and danger of hell rather than providing a description of it.

Review

1. Reflect on the significance of the location and context of references to hell in the New Testament. What can we learn from this?
2. What are the main challenges which strike you in studying the Lord's own example in teaching and preaching the doctrine of hell?
3. Are there any adjustments you need to make in the light of his example?

Chapter Twelve
Preaching the Gospel of Christ

The gospel of Christ must be central in our preaching ministries. We are agreed hopefully on this point. And this book has highlighted the need to preach this glorious gospel because of the plight and danger of men and women who by nature are under the wrath of God. Their desperate need is to hear the gospel of grace and to believe savingly on the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14).

In this final chapter I am taking the liberty of illustrating how one preacher in the twentieth century preached this gospel so clearly and powerfully under the blessing of God that it resulted in many conversions over the years. I am including this brief chapter in order to encourage and stimulate preachers like ourselves to be even more Christ-centred and Gospel-centred in preaching as we communicate this God-given message to unbelievers and believers.

In his Foreword to this collection of preached sermons on Galatians 6:14, the Rev. Eric J. Alexander stated that the sermons are 'shining examples of his preaching Christ crucified'. He added that this preaching 'was a remarkable combination of passionate eloquence and logical reasoning of a profundity on which the most mature hearer had to ponder, with a simplicity that enabled even children to understand him ... We urgently need to be recalled to this central truth of the Christian gospel, to explore it and proclaim it, and above all to glory in it'.

Neither this particular message nor the preacher are chosen to exalt a man and indulge in hero worship. I want no part at all in that.The only reason for choosing this sermon is that when I first read it, I was deeply moved and became more amazed at the love of God manifested supremely and uniquely in the Lord Jesus. It illustrates the fact that Christians also need to hear this amazing gospel—and often—to be reminded of what the Lord has done in securing redemption but also for our hearts and lives to be drawn out in greater love and obedience to him. The sermon chosen is the first in a series preached in 1963 from Galatians 6:14: 'But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...'

All I intend to do is to outline then highlight parts of this sermon.[64]

Introduction

After relating the text briefly to the immediate context of verses 12–13, the preacher proceeds to the wider context of Galatians because the gospel of grace was in danger of being compromised.

In chapter six the apostle then reminds the Galatians that life here is serious and 'is a matter of sowing and reaping'. In countering 'contradictory voices', he asks: '*how does one sow to the*

Spirit ... and reap the blessing of joy and happiness and peace in this world and in the world to come for ever and ever?' The apostle answers the question in summary form in verse 14 as he glories in the cross and shows its centrality. The preacher then emphasised that this was the consistent message of Paul and of the entire New Testament (Matthew 16:13–23, 20:28, Luke 22:19–20, Acts 13:14–41, 17:2–3, Romans 5:5–11, 1 Corinthians 15: 3–4, 2 Corinthians 5:18–21, Revelation 1:4–6). The death of the Lord Jesus is therefore 'the heart and centre of the Christian evangel, the good news of salvation... This is the first and central thing'.

A second question is then posed by the preacher: '*why does Paul glory in the cross?* Because it is by the cross we are saved—'by whom' (Christ by his death for us) which 'is most wonderful'. It 'is the means of my salvation'. 'So the cross is the centre of apostolic preaching because it is the thing that saves us'.

A third question is: '*How does this cross save us?*' He then pictures the Lord on the cross and the thieves, one on either side but urges us to look closely at the One in the middle. Who is he? He is 'our Lord Jesus Christ', the carpenter, the preacher but more importantly the Son of God (Matthew 16:16–17). 'He is the eternal Son of God...the second person in the blessed Holy Trinity. He is God the Son'.

But another question arises here: *what is he doing on the cross? Why die?*

He gives us the answer himself in Matthew 20:28 and Luke 13:32–33. Hebrews 2:9 also confirms that he came into the world to die. 'He took on human nature in order that he might die'.

> Why did he do this? He came because you and I and all mankind are guilty and under the condemnation of a Holy God. He came to deliver us from this world which is doomed to disaster and final destruction. We all belong to the world ... and we will

> bear the world's fate, unless he can deliver us. That is why he did it. 'For all have sinned ... (Romans 3:23)'. God is holy. God is righteous ... of course, that means nothing to us. How can we think of holiness. We, ugly, foul, vile, sinful creatures. No, we do not understand the righteousness of God. That is why modern man does not believe in the blood of the cross. He does not know what righteousness is. But God is righteous, he is the lawgiver, he is holy ... he must punish sin. His own holy nature insists upon it and he has told us abundantly that he is going to do so. So here is the problem. Man is a guilty sinner. God is a holy God. How can the two be brought together? The answer is the cross of Christ.

The preacher then underlined the fact that 'the wages of sin is death'(Romans 6:23) and 'without shedding of blood there is no remission'(Hebrews 9:22). He illustrated this by describing the Old Testament sacrifices and also the deliverance from Egypt. While death struck all the firstborn of the Egyptians, the firstborn of Israel were spared because 'they had taken a lamb and they had slain it and then painted the door posts and the lintels with the blood of the lamb. And they were passed by, their sins were not punished and their lives were saved'.

Lamb of God

But the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. He is 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). All the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament 'were but types and shadows, indications' or pictures of this one and final sacrifice on the cross.

> God has provided his own sacrifice. It is his own Son. This is what happened on Calvary's tree. God took your sins and mine and he put them on the head of his own Son, and then he smote him, he punished him, he struck him, he killed him. The wages of sin is death.

He then referred to key texts like 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 53:6. 'That is what the Father did. What did the Son do? He was passive as a lamb, he did not grumble, he did not complain. He took it all upon him... He surrendered himself deliberately and freely.'

Then the preacher used Galatians 1:4: 'who gave Himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father' (see also 2:20).

> That is the gospel. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' (also 1 Peter 2:24). That is why it happened ... It is the cross of Christ that saves us. He saves us by bearing our punishment and by taking our guilt upon him. God smites him, and the law of God is satisfied. I am dead to the law through the law. The law has been carried out. Carried out upon him, so I am free. 'There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus' ... It is the cross that saves me. What am I to do? ... You and I have only one thing to do. I have nothing to do but to believe this message. Nothing else ... It does not matter what you have been ... I do not care who you are, because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. I do not care what particular form your sin takes ...The preacher is not interested in that ... I do not care what your sins are ... if you believe that this is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that he died there on the cross, for your sins and to bear your punishment ... If you believe that ... and rely utterly upon him and what he has done, I tell you, in the name of God, all your sins are blotted out completely, as if you had never sinned in your life, and his righteousness is put on you and God sees you perfect in his Son. That is the message of the cross, that is Christian preaching, that it is our Lord who saves us, by dying on the cross, and that nothing else can save us, but he can save whosoever believes in him (Acts 16: 30–31).

> My friends, that is why the apostle glories in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had a message that he could take throughout the world, to the … vilest and most hopeless … and equally to the respectable and all the good and the nice and the kind … And he had the same message for them all, that they were all lost and dead, but that whosever believed in this message was immediately justified …

I want to ask you a question. The Gentiles who heard Paul preach in Antioch of Pisidia begged Paul to preach to them the following week, even though the Jews had left.

> They wanted to hear more about it. Do you? … I am going to test you. If you have had even a glimmer of an inkling into this truth you will want to hear more about it. But if you do not want to hear more about it, let me warn you in the words of the Apostle: 'Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you' (Acts 13:40–4).

> Tell me, do you glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? Would you willingly and gladly spend all your days in singing the praise of this Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you? Let us examine ourselves. Let every man and woman answer for himself and for herself.

Let us then finish with the answer which Charles Wesley gave:

> And can it be that I should gain
> An interest in the Saviour's blood!
> Died He for me who caused His pain?
> For me, who Him to death pursued!
> Amazing love! how can it be
> That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!

'To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen' (Revelation 1:5–6).

Appendix: Foreword to the 1984 first edition

Having been present when these messages were first delivered, and witnessed their sobering effect on speaker and congregation alike, I considered it an honour and a privilege to be asked to write a few words commending their publication. Having now had opportunity to consider again their impassioned plea for the faithful declaration of the whole counsel of God—rather than a judicious selection of themes more palatable to human taste—one wonders what preacher among us these days is worthy of such a privilege!

With a ruthlessness that brooks no argument the truths affirmed in this booklet have been firmly rejected by two, if not three,

generations of 'Christians' in our land. For them they represented merely the primitive gropings of a Christianity not fully come of age, the accumulated debris of myths fabricated in the period between the days of our Lord on earth and the time when His teachings and the writings of His apostles were incorporated in the canon of the New Testament.

Little did they realize that in making such claims they were effectively undermining the authority of Scripture in all its parts. For, as this book dearly demonstrates, the entire body of revealed truth stands or falls together. The rejection of parts of God's revelation entails the destruction of the whole. The doctrines of wrath and judgement in the Scriptures are found inextricably intertwined with all other strands of biblical truth, the Sermon on the Mount itself being no exception. Thus, in applying the scissors to neatly trim off its unacceptable edges, these people were effectively committing the whole of Scripture, and its message to sinners, to the shredding machine—with calamitous consequences for church and society alike.

At the heart of this process were the doctrines propounded in this book. Indeed, no other truths were treated with such arrogant disdain—so much so that those of us once tutored in this approach, whose eyes have since been opened to the wonderful truth of God's intervention in grace to save lost sinners, have to confess to our shame that we have often lacked the courage in our own day to deliver this message to the people with the urgency, firmness and passion it deserves.

That is why this book is addressed in the first instance to ministers and preachers of the gospel. It deserves and it needs to be read, however, by a wider public, for there are few publications available today that confront men and women with these awesome realities in their true biblical perspective, in order that they might be saved.

In an age that fondly believes that, if there is a God at all, He exists to serve our ends—and woe betide Him if those ends and interests are challenged!—small wonder that men resist the thought that the reverse is true. Yet such indisputably is the case, God made man for Himself. For that reason He gave him a soul which would enable him to enjoy God's presence beyond the brief span of this earthly existence. This book tells us clearly what will happen if we accede to God's wishes, and what will happen if we do not.

I make but one appeal to all who read—that they look up the Scriptures to which the author refers. He has faithfully brought them to our notice and endeavoured to explain their significance with a due sense of their awesome reality. Let our argument be not with him but with the great Author Himself, whose words we would do well to heed.

J. Elwyn Davies
Bridgend 1984

Notes

1. See my detailed introduction to his life and theology in *A Father in the Faith: J. Elwyn Davies, 1925–2007* edited by John Emyr (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2012), 13–41. A similar introduction is provided in the Welsh language version of the book, *Porth yr Aur,* John Emyr (ed.) (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2011), 11–43.
2. D. Eryl Davies< *Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Evangelicals in Wales: Bala Ministers' Conference 1955–2014* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2014).
3. *The Wrath of God: the Biblical Doctrine of Wrath, Final Judgement and Hell* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1984).
4. This was done partly in my *An Angry God? What the Bible says about Wrath, Final Judgement and Hell* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 1991).
5. One example is A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Baker), 97.
6. James I. Packer, *Knowing God,* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), 166.
7. R.V.G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale Press Monograph, 1951), 9.
8. *The Works of John Flavel* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), vol. 1, 470.
9. *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20–4:25, Atonement and Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 79.

10. *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), see especially pages 75–84. There are also three helpful chapters on this subject by Professor Paul Wells in his *Crossroads: The Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2006), 55–92.
11. *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God,* 80. For further reading in exploring the Hebrew rather than the Greek philosophical and cultural background to the New Testament, read Dr Tom Holland's excellent *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2004), especially pages 51–68. Consult also Tom Holland's *Romans: The Divine Marriage* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications/Wipf and Stock, 2011).
12. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol.2; 887.
13. Quoted by E. F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964), 49.
14. Sadly some contemporary writers and preachers have disagreed. See, for example, Arthur C. Custance's *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979). Custance minimizes the gravity of sin by understanding it only as a '*temporal offence*' which in turn undermines the doctrine of eternal punishment and the nature of the atonement.
15. John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Baker, 1980), p. 81.
16. A helpful biography is *John Elias, Life and Letters* by Edward Morgan (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973).
17. Generally, they distinguish sharply between the church and Israel in God's purpose. They often teach a pretribulation rapture of the church into heaven, and a literal fulfilment of prophecies concerning Israel. Biblical history is divided into seven 'dispensations', although these are often modified today. The teaching owes its origin to J.N. Darby (1800–1882) and became popular through the Scofield Reference Bible.
18. A range of positions are held but the main thrust is that Christ will return before the millennium; for some, the great tribulation will also occur prior to the millennium.
19. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), vol. 1, 525; vol. 2, 193–4.
20. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 218.

21. *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953), vol. 5, 242.
22. P.E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1962), 180.
23. P.E. Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 180.
24. John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 65.
25. W. Hendriksen, *Romans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), 97.
26. Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (1966), ch.3: 'The Point of Contact', 38–58.
27. Van Til, *Apologetics*, 57.
28. There are two helpful and necessary footnotes on this subject in A. W. Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), 99, 108.
29. Patrick Fairbairn, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971),23.
30. James Ferguson and David Dickson, *The Epistles of Paul and Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 'Hebrews', 80.
31. Quoted in E. C. Gruss, *Apostles of Denial* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 163.
32. W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Tyndale Press, 1966), 57.
33. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1959), 686.
34. W. Hendriksen, *The Bible on the Life Hereafter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 196–7.
35. *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953), vol. 5, 97.
36. Jehovah's Witnesses in their dubious 'Watchtower' bible translation, interpret the word wrongly as 'cutting-off', in support of their theory of annihilation.
37. Thomas Vincent, *Christ's Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgement* (1667)—quoted from the Welsh translation by Jenkin Jones, *Dydd y Farn Fawr* (1727), 161.
38. *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), vol.3, 137.
39. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 487–91.
40. *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966), vol. 12, 147.
41. John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 57, 53.
42. W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: I and II Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972), 159–60.
43. Augustine, *De Civilate Dei*, xxi 23.

44. E. B. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Eternal Punishment?* (London: James Parker, 1880), 44.
45. I discussed this in more detail in *An Angry God?* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 1991). The Authorised Version uses the word *immortality* only five times in translating two Greek words, *athanasia* and *aphtharsia*. *Athanasia* is used in 1 Corinthians 15: 535–4 in a redemptive context with reference to the resurrection of the body. It is also used of God in 1 Timothy 6:16. The other Greek word *aphtharsia* is used in Romans 2:7, 1 Corinthians 15:42, 50, 52, 53–54 and 2 Timothy 1:10. From these two Greek words we see: 1. they mean more than the survival of the soul at death; they emphasise full participation in eternal life; 2. the words are used eschatologically and 3. in a redemptive, physical resurrection context; 4. the gift of immortality depends on a person's relationship to, and union with, Christ, not Adam nor merely our creation by God. To obtain a more biblical description, I recommend the phrase '*the continuity of the soul*' rather than its immortality. This removes any influence from Greek philosophy, which historically has been significant at times in formulating and defending the teaching that the soul continues beyond death. This description is also more faithful to Scripture and retains a holistic view of humans made in God's image.
46. W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: I and II Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959), 207–8.
47. Hendriksen, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, 208.
48. J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts: Matthew*, (London: James Clark,) 344.
49. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*, 73.
50. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), vol. 2, 883.
51. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth) 495.
52. This teaching emerged on the Continent in the wake of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth-century. It adopted a rationalist interpretation of the Bible, denying the deity of Christ. It taught that Christ's death was not penal and he became 'divine' following his resurrection. The founder, Socinus (1539–1604) also influenced the later Unitarian movement.
53. In AD 325 Arius was condemned at a synod in Antioch for his false teaching involving, among other things, a denial of the deity of Christ. He taught that

Christ was actually created but had a limited pre-existence. Arius understood 'Son of God' only as an honorary title. He died in AD 335.

54. John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 38.
55. E. M. Goulbourn, *Everlasting Punishment* (London: Rivingtons, 1880), 26.
56. Edward Morgan, *John Elias, Life and Letters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 354.
57. Morgan, *John Elias*, 354.
58. *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), vol. 1, 130.
59. Thomas Vincent, *Christ's Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgement* (1667)—quoted from the Welsh translation by Jenkin Jones, *Dydd y Farn Fawr* (1727), 61–101.
60. *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), 888.
61. *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1888), 11.675, 680.
62. *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972), 159–160.
63. William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 371, 398.
64. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *The Cross: God's Way of Salvation* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1986; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1986), 15–38. I strongly recommend that you purchase this book then read and meditate on its contents—prayerfully too.

This book serves as a reality check for the gospel preacher. By way of clear exegesis, stirring quotations, telling illustrations and probing questions, Eryl Davies compels us to ask, 'Does my preaching about the wrath of God reflect the manner and method of my Saviour's?' I remember being deeply stirred by this book when I first started out in the ministry in the 1980s, and it has had the same effect on me now, some 30 years later. Over the years it is fairly easy for a preacher to settle into preaching Biblical Truth in a way that he and his hearers are comfortable and at ease with. This book jolts us out of any preaching-comfort-zone by warning, urging and encouraging us to preach wrath, final judgement, hell and the glorious gospel in a way that our Master Preacher and Precious Saviour did.
Paul Pease, Pastor, Hook Evangelical Church, Surrey.

Of the many reasons the Church has for giving thanks to the Lord for Eryl Davies, his writings over the years on this subject rank near the forefront. This book provides a thorough yet readable reminder of Christian doctrine sadly often neglected, both in personal meditation and public preaching, by the modern church.
Gordon Cook, Pastor, New Inn Congregational Church, South Wales

Dr Davies has spent a lifetime serving Christ's church as a Pastor, a theologian and a local churchman. The need for Biblical wisdom in dealing with the wrath of God is ably met by him. I commend this volume to you and pray that it will have a wide readership. It will take you a couple of hours to read, but it will be worth it. God willing your preaching will be changed by it and so will the people God has entrusted to your care.
Paul Levy, Minister, International Presbyterian Church, Ealing, London

Looking at the doctrine of hell has never been popular or palatal
it has always been necessary. Dr Davies has undertaken his tas
diligence and compassion. His pastoral concern, both for the chur
world is clear in this honest, applied and necessary book.
Philip Swann, Pastor, Llanelli Evangelical Church

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